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CHRISTIAN KABBALAH AS A POLITICAL FACTOR IN EUROPEAN HISTORY

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Introduction

The occult, mysterious, secret and magic character of the Kabbalah has unavoidably led to the emergence of a long series of legends about and around it. Little surprise, then, in the fact that these features led its Christian adepts to getting involved in movements with political ends. Many of the brotherhoods initiated in the Middle Ages, be they open – as was, in the beginning, the Order of the Knights Templar – or secret – such as the Rosicrucian Orders, the Masonic Lodges, etc. – were influenced by Jewish mysticism, and particularly by the Kabbalah. The role of Masonry is acknowledged, more or less officially, in the Romanian Revolution of 1848, but also in the founding of the United States of America. The impact of the various, more or less important, movements born from the ruins of the Order of the Knights Templar upon the French Revolution is evident, even if the details are arguable. The movement led by Jacob Frank, favorite of Empress Marie Therese who, together with the thousands of Kabbalistic Jews brought into Catholic conversion in the early 18th century, were assimilated, along with their ideas, into the Polish nobility, intelligentsia and Roman Church, played an important part in the uprising of the Turkish, French and even American revolutions[1].

Lacking in its own sources, Christian esotericism took over a number of Jewish elements, adapting them to its own vision. In these circumstances, the Jewish esoteric preoccupation with prophecy and Messianism became, in the hands of Christian esotericists, a preoccupation with political changes. Of course, to say that the Kabbalah had a direct influence on politics would be an overstatement. Still, the influence that Jewish mysticism exercised, through the Kabbalah, upon the (pseudo)philosophical doctrines providing the bases of several political movements with a decisive long-term impact on mankind cannot be denied. More and more scholars are proving these days that the "scientific revolution" launched in the 17th century, which triggered major changes on the political stage worldwide, was in fact the result of secret movements – amongst which

[1] According to Yakov Leib HaKohain (pen name of author, professor and Sabbatean kabbalist Lawrence G. Corey, Ph.D. in Jung studies and comparative religion, who, as a disciple of the Sabbatean line, converted ritually to Catholicism under the name of John-Francis, to Islam under the name of Aziz Mehmed Effendi and to Vedanta Hinduism under the name of Kali Dass), "*The Influence of Kabbalah on the West*", on-line essay.

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an important part was played by Rosicrucianism and Freemasonry – whose Jewish roots are not hard to pinpoint.

This is an attempt to identify the Kabbalistic elements present in Rosicrucianism, starting from the supposition – already proven by other authors – that this movement was part of the mechanism through which Jewish mysticism influenced politics. As it is not designed to be a historical-political analysis, the research stops at the end of the 17th century when, as Gershom Scholem[2] notes, a radical shift took place in the Christian position towards the Kabbalah. At that point, the interest for the original sources (texts) in Hebrew faded and the senses given to the new Cabala (the Christian Kabbalah) deviated far and for good from Judaism, exiting our area of interest. In the attempt to pursue the mechanism through which Jewish mysticism influenced politics, besides the scientific opinion of scholars one has to also use, acknowledging their relativity, the theories of those who wrote about the hermetic tradition "from the inside". Although, paradoxically, their true concern for the Kabbalah did not make them choose their sources more carefully, they were the first to pave the way for coherent scenarios regarding the Jewish influence upon certain European political events.

Alchemy and Politics

Practiced alongside magic and astrology, sometimes jointly and sometimes separately, alchemy preoccupied Western European philosophers since as early as the publication, in 1150, of the translation of *Turba Philosophorum*[3]. Although all three were, in fact, different aspects of the same concern with esotericism, still the West always thought of them as distinct. Moreover, the Kabbalah, in its turn a mixture of magic, astrology and alchemy, was adopted during the Renaissance in block, as a separate preoccupation. The pioneering effort of Raymond Lull, who attempted to combine all of them in a coherent system, remained singular for a long time. Only towards the end of the 16th century, when, under the threat of the Church, the open practice of magic and astrology had to be abandoned and alchemy, in its capacity as a natural science, although itself not very dear to the Church, remained the only choice, Christian Cabala started to borrow the alchemical symbolism to occult its practical-magical side. This led to the emergence of a distinct branch of the Cabala, which strayed farther and farther from the initial significances taken over from Judaism, but also from the Christian Cabala which continued to evolve, culminating with Christian Knorr von Rosenroth, and implicitly from Christianity.

The transformation began in England, where it was facilitated by the strong Judaic influence of the Old Testament on Puritan and Calvinist piety. According to Frances A. Yates, "*the Puritan cult of Jehovah could only lead to cabalistic studies*"[4]. If in Catholic Europe the Council of Trento had indexed many writings on the Cabala, in an

[2] Gershom Scholem, *Studii de Mistică Iudaică* [Studies in Jewish Mysticism], Ed. Hasefer, Bucureşti, 2000.

[3] Or even sooner, as history records the publication of Robert de Chester's alchemical treatise *De compositione alchemiae* in 1144.

[4] Frances A. Yates, *Iluminismul Rozicrucian* [The Rosicrucian Enlightenment], Ed. Humanitas, Bucureşti, 1998, p. 248.

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attempt to discourage such preoccupations, in Protestant countries it flourished, particularly because the Kabbalah itself had acquired, during the same period, new meanings, with the emergence of the Lurianic speculations, which penetrated Europe at the end of 16th century.

Although it must have had earlier adepts, the new Cabala was acknowledged with the publication of *Monas Hieroglyphica*[5] by John Dee (1527-1608). The book was a mixture of cabalistic, alchemical and mathematical disciplines. While practicing an Enochian type of magic, Dee had an excellent knowledge of the esoteric doctrines, which he tried to combine in a coherent system. He was influenced both by the Renaissance version of the Cabala and, very probably, by the Lurianic speculations, whose religious and mystical fervors are easily recognizable in his outlook. In his turn, Dee had an outstanding influence not just on the British cabalists, such as Robert Fludd (1574-1637), Elias Ashmole (1617-1692) and Thomas Vaughan (1622-1666) (who published, in 1625, the first translation in English of the Rosicrucian Manifests) but also on the German ones, particularly during his journey through Germany in 1589. This trip took place after a long period spent by Dee in Bohemia, and especially in Prague. It is well-known that Prague was Europe's centre of alchemical and cabalistic studies at the time[6]. And if Dee influenced Bohemia, Bohemia influenced Dee as well, and implicitly the Rosicrucians. Let us not forget that Prague was the home of Great Rabbi Low (1520-1609), who, it is said, had created a Golem to help him around the house. Although Gershom Scholem[7] argues that this legend actually started from the application, much later, (in the 18th century) of a Polish model to a famous figure of Prague's Jewish society, it is still doubtless that this type of creative exercise, with its evident alchemical implications, preoccupied the Bohemian kabbalists of the time and this reflected on Dee as well.

Elias Ashmole relates in his *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum* (1652) that, while in Bremen, Dee was visited by "the famous Hermetic Philosopher, Dr. Heinrich Khunrath of Hamburg"[8]. The result of this encounter was the remarkable work *Ampitheatrum Sapientiae Aeternae,* published in Hanover in 1609. The *Amphitheatre* represented, in fact, the final separation from the Jewish sources and set forth the pre-requisites for a new theosophical system, based on a combination of Magic, Alchymia and Cabala, which thus acquired a new sense. The *Amphitheatre*'s symbolism, largely drawn from Dee's *Monas*, was visibly one of the sources of the Rosicrucian Manifests.

At this point it is interesting to note that while Dee enjoyed a warm welcome at Europe's royal courts, in Italy Giordano Bruno was set on fire for, in fact, the same preoccupation[9]. In these circumstances, it is not surprising that few Italians still had the heart to openly manifest their interest in esoteric sciences. Nevertheless, at the turn of the 17th century things seemed to take a new direction. Pope Urban showed some interest and

[5] John Dee, *Monas Hieroglyphica*, Anvers 1564.

[6] According to Frances A. Yates, *Iluminismul Rozicrucian*, idem.

[7] Gershom Scholem, *Cabala şi simbolistica ei* [Kabbalah and its Symbolism], Ed. Humanitas, Bucuresti, 1992.

[8] Quoted by Frances A. Yates, *Iluminismul Rozicrucian*, idem.

[9] Which does not mean that John Dee's success lasted long. In the end his theories were, in their turn, dismissed by the great political figures of the time.

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appreciation for the innocent rituals of a kind of pneumatic magic of Ficinian origin practiced by a dissident Calabrian monk called Tommaso Campanella, the adept of a liberal and utopian Catholicism[10]. Still, the papal appreciation did not help Campanella avoid prison. This was the place of a second encounter of historical importance. While in jail Campanella was visited by two characters who would later turn out to be members of the group that promoted the Rosicrucian Manifests.

Thus, although the Christian Cabala evolved on two different paths – an Italian one, whose climax was Giordano Bruno, and a British one, whose climax was John Dee – through Tommaso Campanella and Heinrich Khunrath they met in a common point: early 17th century Germany. The intersection place was itself not without significance: the way had already been paved by Jacob Boehme (1574-1624), whose mystical writings were impregnated with notions taken over from the Zohar[11]. Boehme was, in Gershom Scholem's opinion[12], the first to promote the conception of Kabbalah as theosophy. Still, if Boehme were, undoubtedly, a Christian mystic, despite his concern with alchemy, at the moment of the apparition of the Rosicrucian Manifests, in the Cabala their adepts were promoting one could hardly recognize the Jewish sources or the Christian values any longer.

Just like the place, the timing of the Rosicrucian Manifests was also full of significance. 1614 was the year when Isaac Casaubon demonstrated that Western Hermeticism was based on false pre-requisites, as *Corpus Hermeticum*, its founding document, was not ancient at all, but had been written in the 2nd – 3rd century AD. It was also exactly 300 years since Jacques de Molay, the last commander of the Order of the Knights Templar, had been set on fire. The famous curse he threw at that point later prompted the wildest speculations concerning the influence of the various brotherhoods born from the Order's ruins upon the French Revolution. These speculations were grounded on the irony of a reality that was seen as Molay's revenge (fate's instrument or determinant?): if a revolution is supposed to normally take place when there is an unbalance and/or a state of national discontent, in the case of France the revolution broke out in a moment of balance when it had no justification, prompting itself a long period of ulterior unbalance. In their turn, meant as an attempt to recover the Renaissance imaginary *within the boundaries of religion*, the Rosicrucian Manifests turned out to be the instrument of its elimination. Mircea Eliade[13] underlines that, from the adepts of Rosicrucianism's perspective, the aim of the Manifests was to integrate the Hermetic tradition and natural sciences into a non-confessional Christianity, in a synthesis comparable with the previous integration of Platonism, Aristotelianism and Neo-Platonism, so as to obtain the knowledge of "total science". But contrary to all intentions and expectations, the result was precisely the opposite.

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[10] As described by Ioan Petru Culianu in *Eros şi Magie în Renaştere. 1484* [Eros and Magic in the Renaissance. 1484], Ed. Nemira, Bucureşti, 1994.

[11] Boehme's first book, *Die Morgenroete in Aufgang*, was published shortly before the Rosicrucian Manifests, in 1612.

[12] Gershom Scholem, *Studii de Mistică Iudaică*, idem.

[13] Mircea Eliade, *Istoria Credinţelor şi Ideilor Religioase* [History of Religious Beliefs and Ideas], Ed. Ştiinţifică, Bucureşti 1991.

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The timing of the Manifests should therefore not surprise, considering that astrology was still very fashionable at the time; it had even known a new impetus. As Ioan Petru Culianu notes[14], under the influence of the Arab philosopher Abu Yusuf Yaqub ibn Ishaq al-Kindi's treatise *De Radiis*, published around the year 873 and translated in Latin in the 12th century, Western Europe was preoccupied with the planets' conjunctions. According to this theory, the planets' general conjunctions, which depended on the periodical conjunctions of the superior planets, Jupiter and Saturn, influenced the fate of religions. Taking this into account, the astrologers of the time expected the year 1484 to bring radical changes and were even the more disappointed to see that the predictions failed to materialize. Notwithstanding, Culianu proposes an interesting theory: if we accepted 1484 as Martin Luther's year of birth[15], then we could say the prophecy was fulfilled. Furthermore, Pope Innocent VIII himself, frightened as he was, like any strong persecutor of astrology, by the conviction that the predictions would turn true, gave, in the same year, the signal for the beginning of the witch-hunt, by issuing the *Summis desiderantes affectibus*. Little did he know that the small prophet he was so afraid of would turn out to be an ally[16] in his fight against magic.

The next planetary conjunction took place in 1604, which explains the interest aroused by a strange piece of work published in the same year by Simon Studion, called *Naometria*. This apocalyptic-prophetic writing was based on a complicated numerology, which attempted to predict future events starting from the biblical descriptions of Solomon's Temple. In this context it becomes evident that in 1614 the world was anxious to see the new change in the fate of religions. To offer people what they wanted to hear, the Manifests gave relevance to these dates, placing the death of the story's main character, Christian Rosenkreutz, in 1484, and the discovery of his tomb in 1604.

The publication of the Rosicrucian Manifests thus fell like a bomb placed at the right time and in the right place. Even their presumed author, Johann Valentin Andreae, was no longer able to convince anyone that they were simply a demonstrative game. The Manifests were apparently confiscated from their initial aim and transformed into a political instrument. Frances A. Yates argues in *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment* that in reality the entire Rosicrucian movement had from the very beginning an implicit and well-organized political layer, designed to bring the Palatine Elector on the throne of Bohemia, and that the esoteric significance was in fact meant to give an occult justification to a political act. Nevertheless, for the true Rosicrucians, i.e. for those who embraced the Manifests' concepts or who promoted these concepts by sharing them with others, the most important aspect of the movement was the religious one. As Frances Yates concludes[17], the adventure which the Manifests were meant to serve was the expression of a religious movement which had been gathering its forces for years and years, nurtured by secret influences flowing throughout Europe, a movement directed at

[14] Ioan Petru Culianu, *Eros şi Magie în Renaştere. 1484*, idem.

[15] Martin Luther's year of birth remains to this day a mystery, considering that he himself oscillated all his life between 1483 and 1484.

[16] The Reform and the Counter-reform had convergent interests in their fight against Renaissance imaginary, magic, and any other form of esotericism.

[17] Frances A. Yates, *Iluminismul Rozicrucian*, idem, p. 55.

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solving the religious problems through the mystical channels suggested by the Hermetic and Cabalist tradition.

The Rosicrucian Manifests

The famous Rosicrucian Manifests, which surprisingly managed to attain the un-proposed, but attributed by their readers, aim of changing the history of the world, were actually two small brochures with long titles, published in Cassel. *Fama Fraternitatis* or "a disclosure of the brotherhood of the noble order of the cross with roses" and *Confessio Fraternitatis* or "the confession of the praiseworthy brotherhood of the honorable order of the Rosicrucians to all scholars of Europe" spoke of a certain Christian Rosenkreutz, supposed founder of an older order, inviting the readers to join in the effort of reviving it in a new form. Whether this Christian Rosenkreutz ever really existed, remains a mystery and is in fact of no importance. On the contrary, what gave the movement such strength was precisely the fact that it was based not on reality, but on legend.

Scholars agree that the two texts proposed, in fact, an educational reform designed to "mend the mistakes of the Church and of the entire *Philosophia Moralis*". Since the Rosicrucian Brothers were reformed Germans, it becomes evident that the movement had from the very start a political implication, being directed against the Jesuits.

The two texts include abundant references to Magic, Alchemy and Cabala. The magic they promote is evidently taken over from the Renaissance, but the emphasis laid on the attraction of the angelic forces sends to Giordano Bruno's demonic magic, which, in Frances A. Yates's opinion[18], may be one of the reasons of the witch-hunt launched against the movement. In these circumstances it is easily understandable why, to be able to entwine the religious vision with the scientific one, the adepts of Rosicrucianism appealed to an alchemy whose phrases and symbols seem more adequate to mystical experience than to a technical process[19], although in reality it is the expression of both.

As far as the Cabala is concerned, strikingly, although the main character is said to have traveled East to seek its original sources, as well as those of the other "natural sciences", it is evident that the author did not even cast an eye on the Jewish Kabbalah, contending himself with the stage the Christian Cabala had reached under the influence of John Dee. In fact, the Manifests include the entire philosophy proposed by Dee in *Monas Hieroglyphica*, with the strange mixture of religiousness and passion for scientific magic that the latter preached. Thus, *Fama*[20] relates that, in Fez, brother C.R. found a Cabala defiled by the religion of the town's inhabitants. First of all, it is striking to find that the Cabala would be defiled if practiced within the frame of a religion other than Christianity, when its Jewish roots were never contested, and, moreover, the main character was supposedly in search of its original sources. And since the idea that the Cabala could have been practiced in the frame of Islam is far-fetched and probably out of the question, there is only one conclusion left: that the passage refers to the Jews of Fez (if any), who would have defiled the Cabala had they practiced it!

[18] Frances A. Yates, *Iluminismul Rozicrucian*, idem.

[19] Fashionable at the time was an alchemical interpretation of the Old and New Testament, whereby Christ was the true sovereign metal of the alchemical revelation.

[20] Published by Frances A. Yates in the Annex to *Iluminismul Rozicrucian*, idem.

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Although not explicitly mentioned in the text, it seems quite clear that, in speaking of *Harmonia Mundi*, the author was influenced by the ideas of Raymond Lull and very probably by the work with the same title by Francesco Giorgio. That the kabbalistic notions had lost almost entirely their original meaning is proved by the reference to the magic language and writing accompanied by a great dictionary created by the first four Brothers. "*We use this language and this writing every day, to praise and worship God, for much wisdom we find in them*", says *Fama*'s author[21]. This reminds of the secret significance of the sacred language in Judaism, but in this particular context the sense is closer to Trithemius of Wurzburg's *Steganographia*[22]. The astrological notions and predictions seem influenced by Simon Studion's *Naometria*, with an easily recognizable series of Jewish elements, the most important of which being the calculations based on the biblical dimensions of Solomon's Temple. Furthermore, the text mentions that "*our philosophy is not a new one, but that which we have received from Adam after the fall, which was also used by Moses and Solomon*".[23] In the good alchemical tradition the author speaks of the truth for which Enoch, Abraham, Moses and Solomon showed their greatness, but also of the mystical significance of alchemy, as opposed to the material one, which ruined the good name of the Royal Art.

An extremely interesting thing about *Fama* is that although we are told in the beginning that brother Rosenkreutz initially left for Jerusalem, he never gets there[24]. The text seems to give little importance to this failure, which to us looks very relevant. In other words, Brother C.R. never reached the source (either Jewish or Christian) of the Cabala, constantly contending himself with the information filtered by the Arab intermediation – an unfinished initiatory journey.

A strange and unexplained sentence can be found at the beginning of the second text, *Confessio*[25]. "*This refers to the fact that our Lord, Jehovah, will change the course of Nature (which, at seeing God's Sabbath is closing in and the time has come, is hurrying once again towards the beginning of all things)*". Obviously, the paragraph refers not only to the importance attached by alchemy to number 7 – although, under the influence of Khunrath's *Amphitheatre*, the Jewish source is visible in the symbol of the 7 steps of the Wise Men's Ladder, which reminds of Jacob's Ladder and of the 7 steps the mystic must take to reach the Divine – but also to the kabbalistic notion of the Sabbatical Year. This is even the more surprising considering that during the Renaissance the Sabbath was linked to demonic magic, while here it suddenly appears with its original positive meaning. A book published around the year 1250 in Catalonia, *Sefer ha-Temuna* (The Book about the Letters' Image as the Representation of the Divine), speaks about the aspects of a

[21] Annex to *Iluminismul Rozicrucian*, Frances A. Yates, idem, p. 262.

[22] Trithemius of Wurzburg (1462-1516) was a monk who asked Emperor Maximilian to institute the capital punishment for witchcraft in 1508, while being himself one of the greatest wizards of his time, his authority being equal, in the eyes of his contemporaries, to that of Hermes and King Solomon.

[23] Annex to Frances A. Yates, *Iluminismul Rozicrucian*, idem, p. 269.

[24] This is not the only contradiction of the text, where we find that Rosenkreutz could not leave for Jerusalem because his body was frail but he reached Damascus "healthy as a Dutchman" (!?)

[25] Annex to Frances A. Yates, *Iluminismul Rozicrucian*, idem, p. 271.

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succession of creations. Each such aspect is governed by one of the 7 subordinated *Sefirot*, as God's creative power is manifested in each *Sefira* and in the cosmic unit formed by it, the *Shemita*. In the succession of the 7 *Shemitot*, which make up the Jubilee Year of the worlds, becomes manifest the entire creative power of God, which, according to the Kabbalah, means the return to the primordial state, to purer forms and harmony, or, in Rosicrucian words, to the beginning of all things. Let us not forget that a similar trend, characterized by the same anticipative expectation, was circulating at the time among the Jews, which made possible the emergence of Sabbateanism, 50 years later.

Another odd reference is "*how wonderful it would be if you could* […] *bring the powerful princess of the world close to you*".[26] Although the sense of this sentence is hard to assess, since it is not explained anywhere in the text, still a faint resemblance is visible to the kabbalistic notion of *Malkhut* or *Shekhinah*, the female aspect of the Divine but also God's presence in the world, taken over by alchemy under the form of the symbol which sees woman as God's strength.

There is, in the text, a short paragraph which gives the best indications concerning Kabbalah's influence on it, and implicitly on Rosicrucian philosophy: "*These signs and these letters, just as God set them here and there in the Holy Scriptures or Bible, so did he imprint them most visibly in the wonderful creation of heaven and earth, and even the beasts. Indeed, just as the mathematician and the astronomer know long in advance what eclipses are going to take place, so can we faultlessly know beforehand and predict the darkness of the Church's blackouts and for how long they will last. From these signs and letters we borrowed our magic writing, and we found and created a new language (just) for us, in which is visible and expressed the nature of all things. Thus it is not surprising that we easily speak other languages, languages which we know to be entirely different from that of our ancestors, Adam and Enoch, and which have disappeared forever following the confusion at the time of the Babel Tower*".[27] The kabbalistic origin of the notion that God set the signs and letter in the Holy Scriptures according to a certain code, which he also used to create the world, is obvious. Let us recall at this point that in the kabbalists' opinion, Torah preceded the creation, being an instrument used in the divine process. The Holy Scripture was then given by God to Moses in a non-modifiable form, including potentially all the aspects and profound significances of each letter, each linked to a secret, endlessly, its reading being an act of cooperation with God and a con-creation of the world. The magic language and writing also seem to be conceptions taken from the kabbalistic works rather than from Trithemius' *Steganographia*, given the interest in the use of permutations of divine letters and names to magic ends of both Jewish kabbalists and Christian cabalists.

It was absolutely natural for a religious movement which, using alchemical symbolism, attempted to intensify Evangelic piety through the reformation of sciences, themselves conceived of in Hermetic and Cabalistic terms, to attract society's interest, but also to loose control over the consequences of the publication of its birth certificate. Similarly unsurprising is the fact that the Church was not particularly fond of this movement. Nevertheless, the more dangerous association with the Rosicrucian Order

[26] Annex to Frances A. Yates, *Iluminismul Rozicrucian*, idem, p. 272.
[27] Annex to Frances A. Yates, *Iluminismul Rozicrucian*, idem, p. 276.

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was, the more attractive it must have seemed to people at the time, since so many rushed to manifest their willingness to join in the organization's aims.

To get an idea about the fame Rosicrucians enjoyed in the epoch it is enough to quote from Abbot Langlet du Fresnoy's *History of Hermetic Philosophy*[28]: "*the meditations of their founding fathers largely exceed what has been known since genesis onwards, for they are destined to achieve the overall restoration of the universe. They are not subject to either hunger, or thirst, or old age, or any other natural disturbance. They know through revelation those who are worthy of admission in their society. They can, at any time, live as if they have existed since the beginning of the world or as if they are going to exist until the end of time. They can force the most powerful spirits and demons come down and serve them*". Could we find a better expression of the combination of Kabbalah (overall restoration of the universe) and Renaissance demonic-magic (they can force spirits and demons come down and serve them) that provide the basis of Rosicrucianism and a better explanation for the Church's aversion to this enterprise?

A third text, *The Chemical Wedding of Christian Rosenkreutz,* published in 1616, only increased the mystery and unleashed new disputes. If the author of the first two is still under a question mark, today there is no doubt that the third belongs to Johann Valentin Andreae (1586-1654). Described by the author himself as a literary attempt of no great value, *The Chemical Wedding* was intended as a farce to mislead those interested in Rosicrucianism. Ironically, it became the very proof of its existence.

The title undoubtedly refers on the one hand to alchemical symbolism and on the other hand to the erotic symbolism that characterized, in fact, all forms of esotericism, from Kabbalah to Western magic and alchemy. Frances A. Yates[29] quotes the opinion of early scholars who considered that in the *Chemical Wedding* one could identify the influence of both Simon Studion's *Naometria* and John Dee's *Monas*, which Andreae cited nominally. Another important influence was exercised by Khunrath's *Amphitheatre*: its phraseology, its insistence on the analogy between the micro- and the macro-cosmos and its emphasis on magic, Cabala and alchemy are easily recognizable in the Rosicrucian text.

Divided in seven sections (days), whose alchemical significances are easy to understand (which also implies a connection with the seven skies the Jewish mystic must cross on his way to the Throne of Glory, particularly given that it is said that one of the four alchemical paths, that of Fire, which leads to the "King's Palace", cannot be accessed because it is consuming), the story is loaded with the Hermetic symbols of a material and spiritual allegory, designed to illustrate the double meaning of this science[30].

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[28] Langlet du Fresnoy, *Histoire de la Philosophie Hermetique*, 1742, vol. 1, quoted by Julius Evola in *Tradiția Hermetică* [The Hermetic Tradition], Ed. Humanitas, București, 1999, p. 259.

[29] Frances A. Yates, *Iluminismul Rozicrucian*, idem. Yates takes into account the historical context and Andreae's personal meetings, which undoubtedly influenced his evolution and thinking. Thus, the British scholar remarks the fact that the text was written immediately after Andreae had attended the celebrations occasioned by the granting of the Order of the Garter to Frederic of Wurttemberg.

[30] Although the significances of the rose and of the cross are evidently linked to alchemical symbolism, and even to the wider symbolism of Hermeticism in general (in *Tradiția Hermetică* Julius Evola shows that the "Hermetic Gate" of Rome contains the inscription *Ad*

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Still, unlike in *Fama* and *Confessio*, in the *Chemical Wedding* the cabalistic elements are less evident.

Not by chance, in defense of Rosicrucianism wrote the cabalists of the time. In 1618 in Germany appeared *The Pegasus*[31]*, The Firmament or a short introduction to the wisdom of the ancient, which was once called magic by the Egyptians and Persians, but today is rightly called by the Venerable Rosicrucian Brotherhood Pansophia*, in which the author, Joseph Stellatus, considered Rosicrucianism the natural continuation of the Hermetic tradition but also of the Christian Cabala of Johannes Reuchlin, whom he quoted directly. In his turn, Julius Sperber wrote in 1615 an *Echo of the by God enlightened Brotherhood of the honorable R.C. Order* in which he turned out to be strongly influenced by the magic and cabala promoted by Reuchlin but also by Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim and Francesco Giorgi, which is proof of the continuous Italian influence on the development of Christian Cabala in Germany. On the other hand, given the adoption by the Germans of the alchemical cabala during the Rosicrucian fever, even the more surprising seems the interest in turning back to the initial, Judaic, source, which prompted Christian Knorr von Rosenroth to write, towards the end of the century, *Kabbalah Denudata*.

In England, under the visible influence of John Dee, Robert Fludd (1574-1637) continued this new line of Western esoteric tradition, which included alchemy as a science in its own right, besides Magic and Cabala. That Fludd was, just like Stellatus and Sperber in Germany, a direct descendent of Renaissance Hermeticism, is proven by the *History of the Macro- and Micro-cosmos*, which he published under the title *Utriusque Cosmi Historia* or the *History of the Two Worlds* – the Great World of Macro-cosmos and the Small World of Man, or Micro-cosmos. The book was an attempt to revive the ancient Ficinian philosophy, based on the harmony between the cosmic plane and human body. It was in fact an attempt to combine, in a coherent unity, Pico de la Mirandola's theories, mixing Kabbalah and Hermetiscim, with the ulterior medico-astral theories of Paracelsus and the ideas of John Dee. Fludd's interest in the recovery of Renaissance imaginary explains his affinity with the Rosicrucian Manifests. Just like their author, Fludd proposed a reform based on the new developments of Magic, Cabala and Alchemy, taken over in their initial Renaissance form and updated.

In their turn, the two works in which he manifested his admiration for the Rosicrucian Brothers, *Succinct eulogy for the Brotherhood of the Cross with Roses, washing like a flood the stains of suspicion and infamy it was besmeared with*[32] and *Eulogy Treatise in support of the Society of the Cross with Roses*[33], place Fludd's philosophy in continuation of the original Hermetic tradition of *Corpus Hermeticus* and

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Rosam per Crucem), starting from the much discussed parallel with the Knight of the Red Cross in Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, published in 1590 (i.e. before the Manifests), Frances A. Yates reaches the conclusion that behind the name of Rosenkreutz lies the additional influence of a historical moment – the above mentioned granting of the British Order of the Garter to Frederic of the Palatinate.

[31] Which reminds of Giordano Bruno's "*Cabala del cavallo Pegaseo*" (1585).

[32] R. de Fluctibus, *Apologia Compendiaria de Rosea Cruce suspicionis & infamia maculis aspersam, veritatis quasi Fluctibus abluens & abstergens*, Leiden (Godfrey Basson), 1616.

[33] R. de Fluctibus, *Tractatus Apologeticus Integritatem Societatis de Rosea Cruce*, Leiden (Godfrey Basson) 1617.

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Tabula Smaragdina, which he quoted extensively. Another source from which Fludd took over a series of ideas was, as shows Yates[34], *De Harmonia Mundi* of Christian cabalist Francesco Giorgi, which proves, on the other hand, that the Italian influence continued to operate upon this branch of Western tradition, and implicitly upon Rosicrucianism.

Although the source of Cabala's alchemical evolution was in England, Fludd saw his works published in Germany, not only because in his homeland magic was forbidden[35], but also because Rosicrucianism was in fact a German movement, even if it had evolved from the pre-requisites of a philosophy developed by the British Dee. As Frances Yates notes, despite the English influence, the Rosicrucian movement did not seem to have raised a special interest in England. Francis Bacon, for instance, shared the cabalist convictions and conceptions of the Renaissance, and in particular of Agrippa von Nettesheim, without having read the Rosicrucian Manifests, which appeared after the publication of his first book. Just like the brothers of the Cross with Roses, he saw the progress of science as a return to the primordial state, in which man's relation with nature would be pure, and his knowledge of nature complete. Since, on the one hand, Baconian elements can be identified in the Manifests, and, on the other hand, Rosicrucian symbols can be found in Bacon's *New Atlantis*, published in 1627, it is obvious that the influence was mutual. The difference between the two views lied in the fact that Bacon militated for the revelation of secrets, for the disclosure of symbols and against the macro- and micro-cosmic philosophy providing the basis of the theories on the universal harmony sustained by his fellow countryman, Robert Fludd.

In a book published in Paris in 1623, *Instruction a la France sur la verite des Freres de la Rose-Croix*, Gabriel Naude provided a list of the works which had influenced, in his opinion, the Rosicrucian Brothers' doctrine, which firmly placed the movement within the Hermetic tradition. The list included John Dee with *Monas Hieroglyphica*, Johann Trithemius with *Steganographia,* but also Francesco Giorgi with *De Harmonia Mundi* and "Brunus, Les umbres de ses idees" (Giordano Bruno with *De umbris idearum*). Also present on the list was, of course, Paracelsus with his "commentaire de la Magie", and Raymon Lull with "sa dialectique". Even more interesting is the fact that the list included two Frenchmen, Francois Candale with *Pimandre (Corpus Hermeticum)* and "Thyart et sa musique"; through them Naude attempted to assimilate Rosicrucianism to the Hermetic tradition developed in France.

Another important character of the time, who had a remarkable influence on both the German and the English branch of Christian Cabala, was the Flemish Franciscus Mercurius van Helmont (1614-1698). Paradoxically, however, his influence was of an entirely different kind. Unlike most of his contemporaries, van Helmont returned to the original sources of the Cabala, trying to understand the significance of the Hebrew alphabet, as proven by the book he published in 1657 under the title *Alphabeti vere naturalis Hebraici brevissima Delineatio*. His studies provided the basis of Christian

[34] Frances A. Yates, *Iluminismul Rozicrucian*, idem.

[35] This also seems to have a political significance in Frances A. Yates's opinion: she underlines that the publication of Fludd's works in the Palatinate may be interpreted as an acknowledgment of the indirect support he had provided, through his writings, to the Palatinate's politics (Frances A. Yates, *Iluminismul Rozicrucian*, idem).

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Knorr von Rosenroth's *Kabbalah Denudata*. On the other hand, in England, the alchemical Cabala practiced by the "Cambridge Platonists" led by Henry More and Ralph Cudworth, acquired, due to Helmont, a new infusion of Christian values.

Not by chance, the period of the Rosicrucian movement was the most prolific in political utopias. They all seemed to start from the model already launched by Thomas More and, naturally, had a number of common elements. Johann Andreae published the German Hermetic utopia *Republicae Christianopolitanae Descriptio*[36] in 1619, after his friends, Tobias Adami and Wilhelm Wense, had visited Tommaso Campanella in prison and had received from him the manuscript of the Italian Hermetic utopia *Citadel of the Sun*. In its turn, *The New Atlantis*, Francis Bacon's English Hermetic utopia, appeared in 1627. Under the influence of all these utopias, a Johann Andreae matured by experience started to preach for the establishment of "Christian Unions", starting from the model of *Societas Christiana*, a group he had set up in 1618 and which had resisted for two years.

Frances Yates[37] argues that the Manifests were more than a simple religious movement designed to recover the Renaissance imaginary, almost destroyed by the Catholic Counter-Reform. In her opinion Rosicrucianism could be considered an anti-Jesuit and anti-Catholic movement, whose political aim was to oppose the Habsburg-Jesuit alliance, which intended to acquire hegemony in Europe in order to impose Catholicism upon Reform. This political alliance was considered benefic by many Counter-Reform extremists, but even among the Catholics there were enough who were not enthusiastic about it. Among them was Pope Urban VIII himself, whose pro-French and anti-Spanish opinions prompted him to oppose it. In 16th century France this was the political strategy that led to the destruction of Henry III and in Italy to the burning of Giordano Bruno. On the other hand, the attempt to oppose to this political alliance (with all the religious motivation of the Jesuits, who, at a closer look, may turn out to be just that – a simple justification) an SF utopia (in the truest sense of the words!) seems extremely strange. The more relevant is, in these circumstances, the resemblance between the Rosicrucians described in the Manifests and the Jesuits. Let us recall here, first of all, the Renaissance esoteric influences acting upon the Order when Ignacio of Loyola accepted the Hermetic tradition, in order to be able to attract the Protestants as well. Let us also recall that the Jesuits cultivated with assiduity sciences and arts. Moreover, during the Rosicrucian fervor they took over the Manifests' symbolism and encouraged confusion, suggesting that in fact it was one and the same order. The confrontation with the Jesuits initiated by the Rosicrucian Manifests was in fact a first sign of the confrontation to come between the Masonic and the Jesuit attitudes which, as Yates underlines, was going to form on of the most fundamental and secret European patterns, eventually leading to the French Revolution.

Even though the Rosicrucian movement lasted extremely little, disappearing in 1620[38], its reverberations naturally continued to influence Western thinking for a long

[36] *Description of the Christianopolitan State*, Lazarus Zetzner, Strasbourg 1619.

[37] Frances A. Yates, *Iluminismul Rozicrucian*, idem.

[38] Frances A. Yates thinks that this is directly linked to the failure of the Bohemian adventure of the Palatine Elector and his wife, which the Rosicrucian movement was supposed to have assisted by underground means (Frances A. Yates, *Iluminismul Rozicrucian*, idem).

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time. The Rosicrucian Manifests did not manage to attain their proposed political aim; but they did provide, instead, the basis of ulterior political movements. We refer here particularly to the said utopias, but also to the secret organizations[39] – amongst which an essential role played the Freemason ones – that emerged in direct connection with the Rosicrucian Order and which contributed, one way or another, to political events. On the other hand, we also refer to those esotericists who preserved the Rosicrucian elements in their philosophical systems, taking further the Hermetic-cabalist tradition[40], which, after having been the force behind the Renaissance science, thus managed to maintain its power even after the emergence of the "scientific revolution".

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[39] Andre Nataf quotes in *The Wordsworth Dictionary of the Occult* "The Golden Rosicrucian Brotherhood", set up in 1710 by Samuel Richter, and the multitude of orders bearing this name that emerged in the 19th and 20th century.

[40] We shall not, however, attempt to pursue here the impact this movement had on the development of sciences. It has already been proven (Culianu, Yates) that many of those whom history recorded as discoverers in mathematics, astronomy, chemistry, etc. were in fact adepts of Hermeticism and Rosicrucianism whose discoveries resulted from philosophical intuition rather than from so-called scientific experiments.

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CHAPTER FOURTEEN

MYSTICAL ENCOUNTERS: JEWISH, CHRISTIAN AND MUSLIM MYSTICS IN 13TH–14TH CENTURY SPAIN

Felicia Waldman

Medieval Spain as a crossroad of traditions and cultures

There must be a reason for which the about eight centuries spent by various parts of Spain under Muslim influence (from the 8th to the 15th century) are often called "the golden age" and viewed as a "paradise lost," a model of coexistence, even if the life of its inhabitants of varied denominations was sometimes tumultuous, sometimes more relaxed (but never boring!). Nowhere was the interrelation between Judaism, Christianity and Islam closer or more fruitful than in medieval al-Andalus, for instance. Spain was the gateway through which the wisdom of the Far East, but also of the long lost Greek culture, came to Europe. The Western European reader found out about the Egyptian esoteric tradition from the Greeks through the Romans (or, more correctly, through the Latin language). The information thus often came by devious routes, passing through the Middle East, through the hands—but also the minds—of Arabs—but also Jews.

The status enjoyed by Jews and Christians as peoples of the Book under Islamic rule, though often precarious, provided a high degree of legal, administrative, fiscal and cultural autonomy. As *dhimmis*, "protected people," they were set under the same legal umbrella, and were subject to (not isolated from) the same unified law that governed Muslims, the *sharia* (the Islamic Holy Law). Proof of this stands the wide-spread phenomenon of Jews and Christians appealing to Muslim *qadi* courts, which administered *sharia* law. As Mark Cohen puts it:

> Though rabbis objected to this—an impingement upon Jewish autonomy, it was frowned upon since pre-Christian Roman times—they came to terms with the reality. Jews normally felt comfortable before Muslim

> judges and witnesses and even Jewish rabbinical authorities conceded that the qādī courts treated Jews fairly.[1]

In general, shows Cohen, the Jews enjoyed the protection of the Islamic state in return for an annual poll tax payment and compliance with the restrictions of the so called Pact of Umar that suited their lowly religious position vis-à-vis Islam. The *dhimmis* had to show respect not only for Islam in general but also for each Muslim in particular, to the smallest detail, as provided under the various sets of regulations issued from time to time by the authorities. For example, one can read in the market regulations of 12th century Seville that:[2]

> A Muslim must not massage a Jew or a Christian, nor throw away his refuse nor clean his latrines. The Jew and the Christian are better fitted for such trades, since they are the trades of those who are vile. A Muslim should not attend to the animal of a Jew or of a Christian, nor serve him as a muleteer, nor hold his stirrup. If any Muslim is known to do this he should be denounced.

Still, with the exception of the poll tax, the restrictive laws were often circumvented by the *dhimmis*, with the tacit approval of the authorities, at least before the general decline in Jewish status that began around the 12th–13th centuries.

This, nevertheless, does not mean that Jewish life in Spain was entirely easy and that there were no anti-Jewish feelings, writings and even violent outbursts, as proven by the massacres of 1066 in Granada, instigated by the well-documented in terms of the Holy Law religion-based literature of Abu Ishaq.

Notwithstanding, these were rare occurrences in Islamic history. The largely secularized character of the Islamic civilization of Spain, particularly in al-Andalus, allowed the Jews and Christians to consider themselves the heirs of a great and respected cultural tradition. Moreover, it allowed for the emergence of an entirely new type of Jewish society, very different from that of medieval Christian Europe: Jews were able to rise to important positions in public life and the upper ranks of administration, industry, finance and various professions.

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[1] M. Cohen, Under Crescent and Cross: The Jews in the Middle Ages (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1994), quoted in Studia Hebraica 6/2006 (Bucharest: University of Bucharest Press 2006) 25.

[2] B. Lewis, *The Jews of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1987) 38.

These new elites could afford to have wider cultural horizons, more refined tastes, and a more exalted spiritual life.

The evolution of Jewish mysticism in Spain

Emerging from a combination of the earlier Merkabah mysticism and the Creation-type of mysticism prompted by *Sefer Yetsirah*, with its innovative use of letters and numbers ("the 32 wonderful paths of wisdom whereby God created man," i.e. the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet and the 10 primordial numbers), it is thought that the true classical Kabbalah was born in 1180 France, with the publication of *Sefer haBahir*, the Book of Light (or Brilliance). This short and enigmatic writing, compiled, in Mircea Eliade's view,[3] from older materials, treated about the esoteric meaning of various biblical verses, about the Hebrew letters and about the 10 *Ma'amarot* (commandments) through which the hidden God revealed his divine being. Built up as a collection of theosophical explanations of the Bible and quoting as sources rabbis from the Talmudic age, sometimes real but mostly imaginary, *Sefer haBahir* was regarded by Scholem[4] as an exegesis whose unexplained notions constituted a new codification of the sacred text instead of providing a key to decode it. The book was particularly important because it spoke, for the first time, about the symbolic equivalence between the 10 commandments and the 10 *Sefirot*, textually designated as divine attributes. The first Provencal mystic to analyze *Sefer haBahir* and elaborate the *Sefirotic* doctrine, to be later followed by a long line of kabbalists, was Isaac the Blind (approx. 1160–1235), the son of Abraham ben David. His teachings were focused on the manner in which the mystic could obtain union with the *Sefirot* in his meditation and prayer. Rabbi Isaac tried to preserve the mystical conceptions in an elite circle in order to prevent the danger of mistaken interpretations and use for uncontrollable magical purposes. Evidently, this was impossible and soon the

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[3] M. Eliade, *Istoria Ideilor si Credintelor Religioase* (Bucharest: Editura Stiintifica 1991) vol. 3, 162. The study has been published in English as *History of Religious Ideas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1982).

[4] G. Scholem, *Cabala si Simbolistica ei*, Humanitas, Bucharest 1996, 106. The study has been published in English as *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism* (New York: Schocken Books 1965).

Kabbalah became public, attracting the interest but also the criticism of various rabbis.[5]

A nephew of Isaac the Blind, Asher ben David, is presumed to have taken Kabbalah to Spain. It was here, and particularly in al-Andalus, that it flourished spectacularly, during the 13th century. In Catalonia, among the rabbinic circle of Gerona, this new movement found an extremely welcoming ground. Here it was embraced by brothers Azriel and Ezra ben Solomon, Isaac the Blind's disciples, who were apparently the first to write works entirely devoted to the Kabbalah. It was, in fact, in Azriel's works that the neoplatonic elements (taken from the writings of Isaac ben Solomon Israeli), which would later become so important in Kabbalistic thinking, reached their first apex.[6] But the movement's success was ensured by the high standing of Moses ben Nahman (Nahmanides, approx. 1195–1270), known especially for his role in the important 1263 Disputation with Pablo Christiani under King James I of Aragon. The circle of Gerona developed a well-established symbolic framework for the interpretation of the scriptures by use of the Sefirotic theories, and produced the influential *Sefer haTemuna* with its effects on the development of what was to become hermeneutical Kabbalah.

Of course, not all Spanish kabbalists adopted the Sefirotic perspective. There were also thinkers who gave preference to certain philosophic-mystical tendencies, distinct from this theosophical Kabbalistic approach. Isaac ibn Latif who "had one foot inside [the Kabbalah] and one foot outside [in philosophy]"[7] was one such example.

Another trend, which made use of Gnostic notions, leading Scholem to call the respective school "the Gnostic reaction," but also of theurgy and mythology, and quite extensively at that, could be identified in Castile, where it was favored by brothers Jacob and Isaac Cohen, of whom Jacob is known for his Sefirot-based commentary to the letters of the alphabet, very popular during his age, and Isaac is particularly famous unto this day for his *Treatise on the Left Emanation*, which introduced Gnostic dualism in Jewish thought and was quite crucial in the development of the demonic, and in particular of the Lilith, sym-

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[5] It was said, for instance, that the visualization of the 10 *Sefirot* was the same thing as worshiping 10 divinities.

[6] G. Scholem, *Kabbalah* (New York: Dorset Press 1987) 48.

[7] Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 52.

bolism in magical Kabbalah. This was in fact the source of the Zoharic theory of "*sitra ahra*," the other side.

In its turn ecstatic mysticism flourished in Spain under the influence of Abraham Abulafia, one of its most prominent practitioners. Obsessed with prophetical concerns but also messianic visions and an enthusiastic practitioner of *Gematria, Temurah* and *Notarikon*, as well as *Tziruf*, Abulafia even went as far as to play with the Christian idea of Trinity within Jewish thought. As Gershom Scholem shows,[8] he represented himself as a prophet to Christians as well. He mentioned in at least two of his writings his connections with non-Jewish mystics, relating about his discussions with them on the three methods of interpreting the Torah—literal, allegoric and mystic—but also on his success in implanting in the mind of a Christian scholar friend the desire for the knowledge of the Name of God. All these nevertheless do not mean he was inclined to take over Christian ideas as such, but just that he was familiar, and able to play, with them.

Under the influence of Eleazar of Worms' commentary of *Sefer Yetsirah*, Abulafia considered the Hebrew letters, the numbers and the vowel-points to be symbols of existence, and their combinations and permutations, supplementing and explaining one another, to possess an illumining power most effectively to be disclosed in a deeper study of the divine names, and especially of the consonants of the Tetragrammaton. He proposed a true "science of the combination of letters," a methodological guide to meditation based on combination and separation of letters and their configurations, a course in the language that expresses the pure thought of God, whose letters are the elements of both the most fundamental spiritual reality and the profoundest understanding and knowledge: the divine language.[9] By means of methodical meditation he aimed at obtaining a new state of consciousness, a harmonious movement of pure thought, which he compared with music. Moreover, he even tried to prove that this was valid for any language, playing on Latin, Greek and Italian words, since at the basis of all words lay sacred letters. He called his method "The Path of the Names" and considered it much higher than "The Path of the Sefirot," which was good only for beginners!

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[8] G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken Books 1995) 129.

[9] Scholem, *Major Trends*, 133.

He thought that with the observance of certain rites and ascetic practices, any man may reach the highest aim of existence and become a prophet; not in order to work miracles, but to attain the highest degree of perception and be able to penetrate into the nature of the divine, the secrets of creation, the problems of human life, and the deeper meaning of the Torah. Dissatisfied with the simple contemplation of God's majesty provided by *Merkabah* mysticism, he attempted to obtain *unio mystica* with the divine (*devekut*) and become one with God. Synthesizing, in his view, Moses Maimonides' Aristotelianism with elements of Sufi mysticism,[10] Abulafia thus used a series of meditative practices (*hitbodedut*) based on grammatology and the utterance of divine names but also on yoga-type techniques: breathing rhythm, fasting, forms of incantation, which he apparently borrowed from Sufi practices.

For instance, he would immerse in Sufi-like prayers, which involved a complex system of chants, breathing techniques, movements of the head and special clothing. Moreover, Abulafia imported the emotional aspects of Sufism into Kabbalistic practice: in addition to describing the Jewish mystical experience with the Sufi *shath*, he brought in the strongly erotic imagery of mystical union of the Sufis. The divine thus became an object of longing and desire, compounded by years of preparation (the time of study and prayer) and culminating in kissing and even sexual intercourse. This novel Jewish language became quite common in later Kabbalah and even Hassidism, greatly due to Abulafia's influence. For example, this line was continued by one of his most important disciples, Joseph ben Abraham Gikatilla (1248–1305), who loved to use *Gematria*, wrote extensively (and sometimes annoyingly) on the Holy Names (to the point where he triggered the criticism of Isaac ben Samuel of Acre, for instance), and even criticized *Sefer Yetsirah* and *Pirkei Hekhalot*, while holding Maimonides and his thinking in high esteem.

Another outstanding figure of this age, in fact a close friend of Gikatilla, whose interest he managed to divert towards the study of the Sefirotic theosophy, was Rabbi Moses de Leon (approx. 1250–1305), who left a series of texts the ulterior analysis and interpretation of

[10] M. Idel, *The Mystical Experiences in Abraham Abulafia* (Albany: SUNY Press 1988).

which lead to the development of an entire mystical literature.[11] Moses de Leon was considered, for a long time, initially by Gershom Scholem and then by others,[12] to be the father of the most important book for the Spanish kabbalists, *Sefer haZohar*, the Book of Splendor, although in his turn he attributed it to Simeon bar Yohai, *tanna* (master) from the 2nd century C.E. Even though in the meantime scholars like Yehuda Liebes have advanced the theory that the book was in fact a compilation from several unknown authors only edited by Moses de Leon, Rabbi de Leon remains one of the most influential figures in the evolution of the Kabbalah.

Sefer haZohar is a mystical journey through the Torah, through the Jewish law and mythology. According to Gershom Scholem, it is the Judaic theosophy, the mystical doctrine whose main purpose is the knowledge and description of the divinity's mysterious work. Lacking in qualities and being impossible to perceive in His totality, the hidden God, *Ein Sof* (Unending), becomes manifest through attributes that reflect, in their turn, various aspects of the divine nature. Creation takes place inside God: *Ein Sof* comes out of repose and unfolds in cosmogony and self-revelation. This act transforms *Ein Sof*, the ineffable plenitude, into mystical "nothingness" from which the *Sefirot* emerge.[13] Thus, the 10 Sefirot reflect God's 10 fundamental attributes but also the 10 levels through which divine life flows. Each of them has a specific significance and together they make up the "unified universe" of the divinity, under the form of God's mystical tree. Kabbalists find this structure in all forms of life. Thus, the *Sefirotic* tree may be used to render the evolution of the vegetal and the animal world and at the same time of the human body,[14] in perfect parallelism with other traditions, like for instance the Indian one.

On the other hand, these 10 *Sefirot* make the connection between the 22 letters, in a complex but integrated system. Letters are important not only because they symbolize notions, and concepts, and images but also because they are the means by which the world was

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[11] This may be the reason for which some modern scholars conclude that in its Kabbalistic form Judaic mysticism is literary, not experiential.

[12] G. Scholem considered the *Zohar* a step-by-step answer to Moses Maimonides' *Guide for the Perplexed*.

[13] This is the explanation proposed by Eliade in *Istoria Ideilor*, 169. Other scholars, however, have argued that in Judaism there is no *creatio ex nihilo*, the term "nothingness" having a different connotation than in Christianity or Islam.

[14] The resemblance with Indian chakras is easy to remark.

created and through which God's names can be uttered and used in mediation. It is thus obvious that in the *Zohar* and in the Kabbalistic line it has determined, the organic symbolism is accompanied by the symbolism of the Word, through the names God gave Himself.

During the following period Kabbalah evolved with the publication of a great number of imitations of and commentaries on the *Sefer haZohar* but also with the initiation of attempts to reconcile it with the Jewish Aristotelian philosophy. The school of Gerona was continued by Nahmanides' disciples, like Solomon ben Abraham Adret and Isaac ben Todros, or Elhanan ben Abraham ibn Eskira, who wrote in Arabic and tried to merge the Gerona tradition with the neoplatonic philosophical type of Kabbalah. The Abulafia line was followed in its turn by, among others, Isaac of Acre, and resulted in a literature which brought together the science of letter combination with the *kavanot* of theosophical Kabbalah. Still, Kabbalah's further periods of glory were to evolve in Italy and Palestine, leaving Spain behind.

Influence of Jewish mysticism on Christian thought in Spain

The evolution of the Kabbalah in Spain naturally influenced Christian thinkers and eventually led to the emergence of a so called Christian Cabala.

Although history did not record him as the formal father of Christian Cabala, which he anticipated but whose birth he did not determine, the Catalan philosopher and mystic Ramon (Raimondo) Lull (1232–1316) was the first to open, through his teachings, the path whereby elements of Jewish Kabbalah penetrated into Christianity. Lull was, undoubtedly, a remarkable figure of his age and therefore his contribution to the development of medieval thinking has fascinated many scholars. In the view of Ioan Petru Culianu, who thinks that "in each century there are not more than three scholars who can understand the importance of Lull's speculations,"[15] Lull was obsessed with decoding the primordial, divine Language of creation. Living in a period when certain regions were under the domination of the Catholic Church, a large part of the North was under the influence of

[15] I.P. Culianu, *Eros si Magie in Renastere. 1484* (Bucharest: Nemira, 1994) 63. The study has been published in English as *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance* (Chicago: Chicago University Press 1987).

Muslim Arabs and the Jews were bringing an important contribution to the entire local culture, and under the influence of the Sufi mystic Ibn al-Arabi, whose literary material he used, Lull probably had the revelation of the Arabic language, based on the simple principle of permuting three-letter groups. By analogy, Lull must have sensed that the Language of creation must have had a similarly simple structure. What he proposed in the philosophical system he imagined was therefore an approximate expression of the ineffable reality.

But, although Culianu suggested Lull's source of inspiration was the Arabic language, one must recall here that both the preoccupation with the language of creation, and the science of the permutation of letters, *temurah*, were characteristic to Jewish mysticism as well, as was the science of letter combination, so dear to Abraham Abulafia. There is no doubt that Lull was influenced by Kabbalah when he wrote *Ars Combinatoria*, where he proposed various figures made up of two or more superposed and mobile circles, whose motion determined the formation of all the desired alphabetical substitutions.[16] What led Culianu to conclude that Lull must have had an Arab source was the fact that he identified in Lull's works the influence of the Arab astrologer and philosopher Abu Yusuf Yaqub ibn Ishaq al-Kindi, more precisely of al-Kindi's book *De Radiis*, published around 873. Al-Kindi's interest in sound magic, which found its expression in an outstanding language theory ("when the meaning given by harmony and the meaning given by man coincide in a sound, the significance power of that sound is doubled")[17] made Culianu think that he provided the basis of later Kabbalistic theories. Moreover, Arabic, which was the dominant language in Spain, was not strictly related to religion. It was the new international language of civilization and culture, and as such it replaced the former vernacular language, Aramaic, which henceforth was used only for Talmudic texts. The Jews employed Arabic in all their intellectual activities: sacred and profane literature, science and religion, translations and commentaries on the Bible and the Mishna. It was used for liturgical purposes, in theological treatises, in grammars, dictionaries and in correspondence and even when commenting on their sacred texts.[18]

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[16] Culianu, *Eros si Magie*, 238.

[17] Quoted by Culianu in *Eros si Magie*, 177.

[18] H. Zafrani, *Convergent Streams*, in "The UNESCO Courier," December 1991, 35, (available online at http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0009/000903/090316eo.pdf).

Nevertheless the Jewish concern with the significance of sacred language is older than the Kabbalah and it seems quite obvious that in his turn al-Kindi could have been aware of this concern. Moreover, as we have seen earlier, the issue of the divine language haunted Abraham Abulafia as much as it haunted Ramon Lull. In the words of Haim Zafrani, "Jewish and Muslim philologists alike became aware of the kinship between Arabic, Hebrew and Aramaic. But it was only the Jews who, knowing all three, were in a position to lay the foundations for a comparative study of these languages."[19] Still, according to Gershom Scholem it is quite probable that the theory of the Divine Logos had its roots in the Arabic neoplatonic tradition.[20] Furthermore, in his *Book of the Lover and the Beloved* Lull himself tells the reader that he drew upon Muslim sources: "Certain men called Sufis" set down

> words of love and brief examples which give men great devotion; and these are words which demand exposition, and by the exposition thereof the understanding soars loft, and the will likewise soars, and is increased in devotion.[21]

Just like Abraham Abulafia, who uses Sufi type erotic symbolism in the description of his mystical experiences,

> under the essentially mystical figure of the Beloved—God—and His lover—the contemplative soul—Lull not only uses picturesque and appealing language to describe the Incarnation, the Passion and the Crucifixion of Christ, but points those who have fallen in love with God to the renunciations, the perils and the glories of the mystical life and to the sublimity of its goal.[22]

An entirely different view proposes Frances A. Yates.[23] She thinks Lull had the idea of unifying all three religions by developing a philosophy incorporating elements common to all. In her opinion, Lull's ultimate aim was conversion of the heathens to Christianity rather than simply tolerance and search for the truth for its own sake. However, the way he intended to convert them was through rational and mystical doctrine, rather than the tortures that the Church was to employ so

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[19] Idem.
[20] Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 53.
[21] E.A. Peers, *The Mystics of Spain* (London: George Allen & Unwin 1951) 16.
[22] Idem.
[23] F.A. Yates, *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age. Selected Works* (London: Routledge 1999).

efficiently and brutally some two centuries later. Lull thus based his Art on the importance which Christian, Muslim and Jew each attached to the Divine Names or Attributes, or, as he called them, Dignities (*Sefirot* in the Jewish and *hazarat, hadarat* in the Islamic tradition). He mentioned in his works nine such Dignities (or Dignitaries): Bonitas (Goodness), Magnitudo (Greatness), Eternitas (Eternity), Potestas (Power), Sapientia (Wisdom), Voluntas (Will), Virtus (Virtue), Veritas (Truth) and Gloria (Glory). Thus, according to the diagram, which appears in the 15th century edition of his book *Ars Brevis*, this is how Lull saw the Sefirotic Tree:

Keter (Crown, Divine Will) = Voluntas (Will)
Hokhmah (Wisdom) = Sapientia (Wisdom)
Binah (Intelligence) = Veritas (Truth)
Hesed (Mercy, Love) = Bonitas (Goodness)
Gevurah (Strength) = Potestas (Power)
Tiferet (Beauty) = Virtus (Virtue)
Netzach (Endurance) = Eternitas (Eternity)
Hod (Majesty) = Gloria (Glory)
Yesod (Foundation) = Magnitudo (Greatness)

In addition, as Yates shows, by also incorporating letter permutation, the four elements and the qualities, the seven planets and twelve signs, medicine, alchemy and geometry, Lull brought together what was most representative for the esoteric side of each of the three traditions. Still, his enterprise was by no means chaotic. Under the influence of Kabbalah but also of Aristotelian categories, Augustinian Platonism (nearly all the Lullian Dignities can be found listed as Augustine's Divine Attributes) and the celestial hierarchies of angels of the Christian Neoplatonist Dionysius, he elaborated a system of correspondences between the nine Dignitaries and the celestial sphere, the human body, the animal and plant and material creation in general.

Just as Culianu underlined, although remarkable, Lull's effort remained singular. Though his preoccupation with the Original Language and the Art of Memory provided the starting point for a line of philosophical and mystical speculation that continued to flourish, what history records as the actual Christian Cabala emerged later, in Italy, with Pico della Mirandola, on the path paved by Marsilio Ficino.

On the other hand, with Lull martyred in North Africa in 1315, it took two centuries for another mystic of comparable stature to emerge

in Spain, in the person of Garifa de Cisneros, the Benedictine Abbot of Montserrat, who shot at fame with a *Book of Exercises for the Spiritual Life*, paving the way for his more famous fellow mystic (and not only) St. Ignatius of Loyola. Likewise, later Spanish mystics like Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross were influenced by Jewish mysticism without however being part of the Christian Cabalah.

Spanish Sufi masters with an influence on the evolution of mysticism

As mentioned earlier here, it would be impossible to understand the evolution of Jewish and Christian esotericism in Spain without taking into account the knowledge Jewish and Christian authors had of Islamic thought and Sufi mysticism. The 10th to the 12th century was the golden age of Islamic philosophy in Spain. One must recall that Spain was the birth place of Ibn Rushd (Averroes), who, exactly like Maimonides, tried to reconcile philosophy with religion in his works, and followed the concept of God as the source of emanation of intelligence.

More importantly for this study, Spain (Murcia, to be accurate) was also the birth place of Ibn Al-Arabi (1165–1240), one of the most influential Sufi authors of later Islamic history, whom his followers called *al-shaykh al-akbar*, "the Greatest Master." As he mentioned in his account of his encounter with Averroes, he experienced an extraordinary mystical "unveiling" (*kashf*) or "opening" (*fotuh*) as early as about the age of fifteen. Only after this original divine "attraction" (*jadhba*) did he begin disciplined Sufi practice (*soluk*), probably at the age of twenty. He studied the traditional sciences, Hadith in particular, with many masters and was an extraordinarily prolific author. 850 works were attributed to him, of which 700 are extant, over 450 of them probably genuine. The most monumental, *Al-Futuhat al-makkiyyah* (The Meccan Revelations or Illuminations) consists of 560 chapters that deal with all the Islamic esoteric sciences and the inner meaning of Islamic rites, but his most famous work, *Fosus al-hikam* (Bezels of wisdom), is less than 180 pages long.[24]

Although he maintained that the *Fosus* was handed to him in a vision by the Prophet, he of course cited the Qur'an and Hadith con-

[24] According to W.C. Chittick, "Ibn 'Arabi," in *Encyclopedia Iranica*, available online at http://www.uga.edu/islam/ibnarab.html.

stantly; most of his works were in fact commentaries on these two sources of the tradition, even though he sometimes also quoted aphorisms from earlier Sufis. He was thoroughly familiar with the Islamic sciences, especially *tafsir, feqh*, and *kalam*. Ibn al-Arabi approached every sort of theoretical issue related to the "divine things" (*elahiyat*) and offered a different perspective in each fresh look at a question.

His *Fosus al-hekam* is considered the bible of Islamic metaphysics and gnosis. The book is not so much a history of the prophets, but rather a speculative meditation that contemplates the archetypes of the divine Revelation. Each of its twenty-seven chapters deals with the divine wisdom revealed by a specific divine word or to a particular prophet. In each case, the wisdom is associated with a different divine attribute. Hence, each prophet represents a different mode of knowing and experiencing the reality of God. Here it is worth mentioning an old Kabbalistic practice called "the fifty gates to understanding," which proposes the correlation of a *Sefirotic* combination, starting with *Hesed*, with each day of the period of 49-day period (the *Omer*) between Pesach (Passover) and Shavuot (festival celebrating the giving of the Torah and the first fruit harvest of the year). Thus, for instance, on the second day of the *Omer, Gevurah* in *Hesed*, the mystic comes to meditate on the need for discipline and discrimination in love and on the manner in which these qualities may be improved in oneself. Actually, there are 49 days of self-elevation and self-evaluation followed by a day of prophetic revelation. It is said that this was the practice whereby the people of Israel tried to rise to the necessary spiritual level to be able to receive the 10 commandments of Mount Sinai. Regarded from this perspective, since prophecy is ultimately a transfer of energy from God to man, there are also classifications proposing, for instance, a *Sefirotic* hierarchy of biblical prophecies: Abraham is associated with *Hesed*, Isaac with *Gevurah*, Jacob with *Tiferet*, Moses with *Netzach*, Aaron with *Hod*, Joseph with *Yesod* and David with *Malkhut*.[25]

The similarities between Jewish and Sufi mysticism thus stretch much further than common mystical techniques—like the ritual repetition of the name of God (*dikr* in Islam) or the breathing exercises.

For instance, another notion promoted by Ibn al-Arabi is that perfect human beings are those who live up to the potential that was

[25] According to J. Spiegel, *The fifty gates to understanding*, online essay, available at http://home.utah.edu/~rfs4/jkm.htm.

placed in Adam when God "taught him all the names" (Qur'an 2:30). These names designate every perfection found in God and the cosmos (*al-alam*, defined as "everything other than God"). Ultimately, the names taught to Adam are identical with the divine attributes, such as life, awareness, desire, power, speech, generosity, and justice. By actualizing the names within themselves, human beings become perfect images of God and achieve God's purpose in creating the universe. It is obvious how similar this idea is with the notions proposed by the Kabbalistic thinking. In the Kabbalah, God has 10 names, each corresponding to one of his 10 attributes. These names were given to Adam in the Torah, and each has to be actualized in the process of meditation, from the lowest to the highest.

Also quite similar to Kabbalistic ideas is his conception that even though all perfect human beings, i.e., the prophets and the "friends" (*awlia*) of God are identical in one respect, each of them manifests God's uniqueness in another respect. In effect, each is dominated by one specific divine attribute. Moreover, the path to human fulfillment is a never-ending progression whereby people come to embody God's infinite attributes successively and with ever-increasing intensity. Most of Ibn al-Arabi's writings are devoted to explaining the nature of the knowledge that is unveiled to those who travel through the ascending stations of human perfection.

Last but not least, it is worth noting that Ibn al-Arabi was the first in the Islamic and Sufi tradition to call the Ineffable Pure Light (and identify it with the Absolute Being),[26] a notion which can be found vastly explored in early 13th century Kabbalah. Starting from previous interpretations of the Talmudic legend of the four sages who entered the Pardes (Orchard but also Paradise, which allowed for a vast game of terminology inter-change), an interesting shift occurred in the view of certain kabbalists at about this time: they no longer regarded the story as a game of the intellect but as an experience of the supreme light.[27] Based on the Midrashic texts in which Adam was described as an entity of Light and as having garments of Light, which were lost

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[26] H. Corbin, *Istoria filosofiei islamice* (Bucharest: Herald 2005) 337. The study has been published in English as *History of Islamic Philosophy* (London: Kegan Paul International and Islamic Publications Ltd 1993).

[27] M. Idel, *Primordial Light: The Ecstatic Quest*, course, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1991.

after his expulsion from Eden, these kabbalists thought that Adam's basic activity in Heaven was to contemplate the Light, the *Shekhinah*. The essential element that Adam lost with the fall was thus the possibility to contemplate (experience) this Light. Therefore the restoration of the Adamic state through the ability to contemplate the Light became the very purpose of the mystic's experience. These kabbalists tried to develop special techniques designed to help them reach the pre-fall state of the Primordial Man, enter again the radiance of the *Shekhinah* and even a certain erotic relationship with the Divine Presence, just like in Sufi mysticism. By letter combinations, unifications and reversals of letters, they invoked the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil and the 10 *Sefirot* and they meditated together so that they may watch each other and see to what extent the encounter with the divine radiance made them radiate, in their turn, the light,[28] in an expectation of a corporeally observable radiance.

The cross-influence between Jewish and Sufi mysticism is thus obvious. As we have seen before, it can be easily traced in outstanding Jewish personalities like Abraham Abulafia, Bahya Ibn Paquda, and even Abraham and Obadya Maimonides, the son and respectively grandson of Moses Maimonides.

Conclusion

It is by now visible that we are moving in circles. In Spain Arabs spoke Arabic but also Romance, Christians spoke Romance but also Arabic. Jews would naturally spoke both, in addition to Hebrew and usually several other languages. Christians adopted Muslim ways (especially luxury and comfort!), Jews adopted Arabic meters in poetry and Muslims adopted elements of Greek philosophy. (Combining all three, Christian King Pedro I of Castile [1350–1369] is fondly remembered for his love of all things Muslim and Jewish; of course, he was by no means the only one). Muslims brought the pastries in the celebration of the Christian festivals (like the New Year), which they in turn took over, and shared tournaments with the Christians and chess with the Jews.

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[28] The image can be found in the Torah (Exod 34:35) where it is written: "*And the children of Israel saw the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face shone.*"

Thinkers—be they philosophers or mystics—quoted each other with frenzy and sometimes even had similar ideas *without* reading each other (because of their common cultural background). Traces of Ibn al-Arabi's mysticism can be found in both Abraham Abulafia and Ramon Lull's writings. Elements of Jewish esotericism can be identified in both the Islamic and Christian thought of medieval Spain. Christian topics can be read in the preoccupations of both Jewish and Islamic thinkers of the Spanish golden age. The importance of the Spanish crossroad of the three traditions thus becomes more than obvious and provides explanations for the later evolution of the three trends of thought.

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JEWISH INFLUENCES IN MEDIEVAL EUROPEAN ESOTERICISM

Felicia Waldman

The magical-philosophical background of European history

Ever since the most ancient times, the cult of mysteries has fascinated and therefore knowledge about them and their evolution has become a permanent preoccupation. If, in the beginning, a certain type of esotericism had belonged to religion, being preserved and passed on in the initiatory circles of the priests, in a revengeful move of history, when they gave it up in an attempt to purify the religious dogma, it was taken over by the laymen, who preserved its secret and initiatory character precisely to protect those who practiced it from the church. Relevant in this regard is the outlook of Rene Guenon, who thinks there is a fundamental opposition between royalty and sacerdotalism. In his book Le Roi du Monde[1], Guenon speaks of the existence, in all ancient civilizations, of the notion of King of the World, representing the primordial universal Legislator, characterized by Justice and Peace (both basic notions of Kabbalah). Whether it is called Manu by the Hindus, Mina or Menes by the Egyptians, Menw by the Celts or Minos by the Greeks, this term does not name a figure, but a principle, "*the cosmic Intelligence, which reflects the pure spiritual Light and formulates the Law adjusted to the condition of the world or of the current existential cycle*", and at the same time the human archetype. On the other hand, within the preoccupation to preserve the sacred tradition, the head of the initiatory hierarchy has, by definition, a pontifical character. In fact, this has to do with the very meaning of the word: builder of bridges (which reminds of the Masonic symbolism), mediator of communication between the world below and the higher realms. (This might also be the

[1] Rene Guenon, *Le Roi du Monde*, Les Editions Traditionnelles, Paris 1950.

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source of the universal symbolism of the rainbow – celestial bridge – for the pontificate. In Judaism the rainbow is also the symbol of God's covenant with the People of Israel). In Guenon's view, the balance might have been reached by uniting these two complementary aspects of authority – royalty and sacerdotalism. (Such an attempt may be identified at the origins of Christianity, in the story of the three Magi-Kings). Yet, they were probably never more formally separated than in the Middle Ages, when Royalty and Sacerdotalism were at constant war. Rejected by the Church, esotericism became the "royal tradition", precisely in order to evidence the intention to preserve the initiatory secret. Ironically, it was even adopted by a number of European kings, who encouraged, or took direct part in, the practice of its rituals. Under the threat of being burnt at the stake, underlines Julius Evola[2], Guenon's disciple, the Hermeticists preferred to occult this rituals behind practices more easily accepted by the Church, such as, for instance, the alchemy of transmutation of humble metals into gold and silver. A true mnemotechnical science based on an entire system of symbols evolved in order to allow the transmission of the esoteric teachings to the next generations of "philosophers". Ioan Petru Culianu even called it the Art of Memory[3]. On the other hand, however, one must recall that, paradoxically, the Royal Art was practiced for a long time by respected priests as well.

Although it is obvious that each religion and each people has had, at some point in their past, a cult of mysteries, in the given case of Western Europe the main inheritance comes from the Greek and Roman mysteries, in which is also included something from other esoteric traditions, with which the two nations came into contact. History records a particular fascination of the Europeans for Egypt, which has led to a vast combination of motives. The more indirect was their access to the source, the greater was the fascination. The Western European reader found out about the Egyptian esoteric tradition from the Greeks through the Romans (or, more correctly, through the Latin language). The information would often come by devious routes, passing through the

[2] Julius Evola, *Tradiţia Hermetică*, Humanitas, Bucharest, 1999.

[3] As Nicu Gavriluţă shows in his analysis of Culianu's works, he was fascinated with, and developed an entire theory of, what he called the Art of Memory, in which he also included the sacred memory (Nicu Gavriluta, *Culianu, jocurile minţii şi lumile multidimensionale*, Polirom, Iaşi 2000).

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Middle East, through the hands – but also the minds – of Jews – but also Arabs. On the other hand, European thinking has known, at the same time, the more interesting but also more insidious influence, because it has often acted in a direct manner, of the Jewish mysteries. This influence was constant and mutual because, unlike the old mysteries, taken over by the European heirs and developed by themselves, Jewish mysticism continued to evolve in parallel with European thinking, so that the exchange of views was permanent.

1. Hermes Trismegistos

Various forms of an esoteric tradition undoubtedly continued to exist in Europe at all times, suffering diverse influences and modifications. Nevertheless, the key moment in this preoccupation with the occult is considered to be the adoption during the Renaissance period of the Hermetic tradition[4], precisely because Hermeticism tried to gather in a coherent system all existing forms of occultism. The foundation documents of this tradition were the fifteen tractates of astrology, alchemy, theosophy and theurgy of the Corpus Hermeticum, along with the Perfect Sermon of Asclepius. Dated sometime at the end of the 3rd century AD as the writings of an unknown author (or maybe several) in Egypt, they seemed to be just a small part of a once substantial literature attributed to the mythic figure of Hermes Trismegistos[5]. The texts were collected into a single volume during the Byzantine period and they proved the connections existing between Judaism, Neoplatonism, Gnosticism and Christianity at that time, although it is obvious that each of these traditions had its own answer to the major questions facing mankind.

[4] As an irony of fate, the moment of its adoption did not coincide with the moment of its birth (3rd century) but with that of its rediscovery (15th century).

[5] A Hellenistic fusion of the ancient Greek god Hermes with the Egyptian god Toth, Hermes Trismegistos became the patron of Hermeticism due to the conception that he transmitted light by a process of occultation. His world is one of symbols, for it contains secrets and secrets brought to light are no longer secrets. The invisible only becomes visible through concealment. The epithet "Trismegistos", which appears on the Rosetta Stone, comes from Greek and means "thrice greatest". Gnostics identified him with Moses, Christ or St. John, which is not surprising considering that at the heart of all religions there is a mythological figure who passes on secret knowledge (Andre Nataf, *The Wordsworth Dictionary of the Occult*, W&R Chambers 1991).

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Just like *Sefer ha-Zohar*, attributed to the Talmudic Rabbi Simeon bar Yochai, who lived in the 2nd century AD, but "rediscovered" by Moses of Leon in the 13th century, *Corpus Hermeticum* was rediscovered by the Platonic Academy of the Medici family in Florence during the 15th century. There it was translated into Lain and published in 1463 under the signature of Marsilio Ficino. In its turn, the *Perfect Sermon of Asclepius* reached the Renaissance by a different route. It was translated into Latin in ancient times, reputedly by Lucius Apuleius of Madaura himself[6]. Augustine of Hippo quotes from the old Latin translation at length in his book "City of God", and copies of the work remained in circulation in medieval Europe all the way up to the Renaissance. The original Greek version was lost but quotations from it survived in various ancient sources. The *Perfect Sermon* is substantially longer than any other surviving work of ancient Hermetic philosophy. Some of the topics it touches can also be found in the *Corpus Hermeticum*, others are original. Thus, there are magic instructions for the manufacture of gods and a long and gloomy prophecy of the decline of Hermetic wisdom and the end of the world.

A tradition passed on by Tertulian[7], which can also be found in the Arab alchemical Hermeticism, maintains that the secrets of metals, the forces of magical invocations, "those strange doctrines that include the science of the stars" and the entire corpus of the magic-Hermetic sciences were disclosed to man by the Fallen Angels. By making use of the Biblical notions, Hermeticism acknowledges, from the very beginning, its Jewish sources. No doubt that between *Bnei Elohim* (the Sons of God), who descended on Mount Hermon in the Book of Enoch[8], those *Awake and Watching* who came to instruct mankind in the Book of Jubilees, and *Prometheus*, who taught people the crafts in the Olympic myths there is an obvious parallelism. Hermeticism could have therefore claimed Greek origins. Nevertheless, *Hermes Trismegistos* says in *Corpus Hermeticum*: "*The ancient and divine books teach us that certain angels felt a sudden lust for women. They descended on earth and taught people all the operations of Nature. They drew up the [Hermetic] works*

[6] The author of the famous "Golden Ass".

[7] Tertulian, *De cultu feminarum* I, 2b, quoted by Julius Evola in *Tradiţia Hermetică*, idem.

[8] *The Book of Enoch*, VI, 1-6, VII, 1.

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and from them comes the primary tradition of this Art".[9] The Biblical fragment from which everything started is Genesis 6, 1-4: "*And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose. And the Lord said, My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years*[10]. *There were giants in the earth in those days; and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare children to them, the same became mighty men which were of old, men of renown*". Sliviu Lupascu shows[11] that, although the text does not explicitly mention that God punished His Sons, but only their offspring, the giants, both the Christian and the Jewish traditions have sanctioned as sin the breaking of the balance between the divine and the human plane. After the Adamic Fall, this is the second biblical transposition of the relation between the two realms into erotic terms, in the image of the attraction, which once out of control and turned into practice, becomes fatal. Not by chance in the biblical text the giants are called *Nephilim*, the fallen ones[12]. Belonging to a primordial cycle, they end by being regarded as vestiges of the precedent organization of the world, before the Flood, i.e. before the second punishment.

Even the more relevant becomes, in this context, the fact that the last representatives of this semi-human category were defeated with the Jewish conquest of the Canaan[13]. This is where the break comes in. What loses the Sons of God is their lust for "woman". But in esoteric symbolism the "woman" is related to the female aspect of the divine, to God's presence on earth and to His Might respectively. From this perspective it may said that the Sons of God lust for the Divine Might. This interpretation seems to have proliferated because, in a paradoxical evolution, at a certain point the texts adopt a negative attitude towards the image of the Celestial Guardians who descended among men. If in

[9] Berthelot, *La Chimie au Moyen-Age*, Paris 1893, quoted by Julius Evola in *Tradiţia Hermetică*, idem, p. 23.

[10] Number 120 has a special significance in Jewish tradition. The most common birthday wish is *ad mea ve-esrim*, may you live 120 years! Moreover, the Parliament of the State of Israel has 120 members!

[11] Silviu Lupaşcu, *Sfinţi Ascunşi Călăuzitori de Măgari*, Fides, Iaşi 1998.

[12] From the Hebrew verb *naphal*, to fall.

[13] The famous struggle of David and Goliath.

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the Hebrew Book of Enoch angels Uzza, Azza and Azziel pass on to mankind the magic art so that people may attract the celestial forces down to earth and use them[14], in 1 Enoch (the Ethiopian Book of Enoch), dated sometime between the 2nd and 1st century BC, the Fallen Angels are already seen as demonic figures, and in 2 Enoch (the Book of Enoch's Secrets or the Slavonic Book of Enoch), written in the 1st century AD, a hierarchical organization of this demonic category is already in place, under the leadership of Satanael[15], who was thrown by God out of Heavens because he had "*wanted to place his throne higher then the clouds, which are above the earth, so that he could become equal in power*" with God.

Evidently, from the point of view of the religious authority the problem consisted precisely in the popular belief that these Nephilim possessed and had passed on to mankind, indiscriminately, the celestial secrets. That is why in 1 Enoch we read that, although they had lived in Heavens, the Guardians had had no access to the divine mysteries, and the secrets they had revealed to women would have thus been perverted secrets, causing a lot of trouble on earth. Obviously, such a veiled threat could but incite peoples' interest in magic. The idea of an indirect but indiscriminate access to the divine mysteries continued to fascinate mankind and apparently provided the basis for the esoteric tradition, which Hermeticism tried to preserve.

Naturally, between the moment when the *Corpus Hermeticum* was written and the moment when it was rediscovered, new elements of Jewish, Neoplatonic, Gnostic and Christian esotericism emerged in Europe, both locally and imported from – or through – the Middle East. In the 8th and 9th centuries, when Baghdad was an important intellectual center, a large number of classical Neoplatonic and Gnostic works reached Spain through the Emirate of Cordoba, being translated from Arabic into Latin in the universities of Saragosa and Granada. By an irony of fate, removed soon after their emergence as heresies, these types of esotericism were preserved by various groups, which later returned them to Europe with increased force. There are, for instance, indications that once banned, Gnostic esotericism was adopted by Bogomilists,

[14] Moshe Idel, *Cabbala, Nuove prospettive*, La Giuntina, Firenze, 1996.
[15] This might be the source of the Christian notions regarding the devils.

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Aryans and Arab scholars and returned to Europe through the Cathars and through Moorish Spain.

Back to Hermeticism, it is worth mentioning that the Church Fathers, who were never shy of leaning on pagan sources to prove a Christian point, made extensive use of this literature in their writings, accepting a chronology, which dated Hermes Trismegistos as a historical figure to the time of Moses[16]. As a result, the elements borrowed by the *Corpus Hermeticum* from Jewish scripture, and the Platonic philosophy, were regarded, in the Renaissance, as evidence that it had anticipated and influenced both[17]. The Hermetic philosophy thus became the primordial wisdom tradition, identified with the "wisdom of the Egyptians" mentioned in Exodus but also in Plato's Timaeus. Along with other texts of astrology, alchemy and magic attributed to Hermes Trismegistos, the *Corpus Hermeticum* and the *Perfect Sermon* were used as a strong weapon in the attempt to reestablish magic as a socially acceptable spiritual path in the Christian West. If Hermes Trismegistos was a historical figure approved by the Church Fathers and his writings could be quoted as proofs for Christian viewpoints, then the whole structure of magical Hermeticism became legitimate. In fact, let us not forget that in Matthew 13:10-11, when the disciples ask him "*why speakest thou unto them in parables*?" Jesus himself answers: "*Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given*". Christ seems to practice here a selective esotericism[18] – which is only natural, by definition esotericism is addressed to an elite of initiates, what is accessible to all is exoteric. However, as we all know, the Church never adopted Jesus' viewpoint, preferring the "Church for all" version. Its negative reaction was in direct proportion with the impetus taken by the Hermetic tradition during the Renaissance.

2. Erotic Magic

[16] According to John Michael Greer, *An Introduction to the Corpus Hermeticum,* on-line essay.

[17] It was only in 1614 that Isaac Casaubon published a detailed textual analysis, which proved that the writings dated from the first centuries AD.

[18] As Jay Kinney shows in his on-line essay *Esoterica: Overlooked and Undervalued.*

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In an analysis of the fundamental myths of the various ancient civilizations, Julius Evola identifies[19] the recurrent motive of a deed presenting a fundamental risk and incertitude, and finds that in all of them the interpretation of such a deed evidences the emergence of two opposite conceptions: heroic-magic and religious. From the viewpoint of theology, Adam has committed the capital sin and therefore no longer has access to the Tree of Knowledge, protected by the Cherub's sword. But from the perspective of magic, since Adam has succeeded in touching the Tree and thus knows the secret, the experience is duplicable. The flame does not die but it is "*passed on and purified in the Secret tradition of the Royal Art, which in certain Hermetic texts is explicitly identified with Magic, and tends to create a second "Wood of Life", to replace the lost one, and is aimed at that access 'to the heart of the Tree in the middle of the earthly Paradise', which implies a terrible fight*", explains Julius Evola[20]. On the other hand, however, it is obvious that such an enterprise could not enjoy the divine approval. The negative implications suggest that the Royal Art is a means to constrain God to participate in the magic act, a way of forcing the divine hand. If God doesn't answer prayer, He will most certainly react to the appropriate stimulation. From this view to demonic invocation there was only a step, enthusiastically taken during the Renaissance. From this perspective, the secret hidden by the Tree of Good and Evil is that man is equal to, or even higher than, the celestial gods. "*For no god leaves his realm to descend on earth, while man does ascend to the skies and measures him. That is why we dare say that man is a mortal god and an Uranian god is an immortal man*", assures Hermes Trismegistos[21]. It is therefore easy to understand why Hermeticism swept Renaissance people off their feet.

As mentioned before, the opposition between the magic and the religious did not prevent the existence, in the period providing the object of this study, of a permanent intertwinement of the two planes, particularly materialized in the magical practices of representatives of the religious authority. But even in these cases, we are obviously dealing with clerics with visible philosophical inclinations. Reviewing the list of personalities who adopted it, one may notice that, practiced more or less officially in other religions (Judaism, Islamism), magic was infiltrated in

[19] Julius Evola*, Tradiţia Hermetică,* idem.
[20] Julius Evola*, Tradiţia Hermetică,* idem, p. 24.
[21] *Corpus Hermeticum*, X 24-25, Herald, Bucharest.

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medieval Christianity by philosophy. If astrology and alchemy, in their turn inheritances from the Hermetic tradition, had re-emerged in Western Europe, particularly by means of the Arab writings, since the 11th century, and were used as "natural sciences", magic was not officially adopted until the *Corpus Hermeticum* was translated by the Neoplatonic philosopher Marsilio Ficino in the 15th century.

An important aspect in the evolution of magic during the Renaissance, which must be taken into account for a better understanding of this movement's phenomenology, is its direct relation with the erotic. Michel de Certeau argues[22] that the erotic emerged in the Renaissance culture as the outcome of a mystical nostalgia for the disappearance of God as Unique object of love, being the result of a break-up and an absence. Starting with the 13th century the demythologization of religion seems to be accompanied by a progressive mythification of love. Thus, in Certeau's view, a transformation occurred of faith into eroticism. This provided the grounds for the later development of the female symbolism during the Renaissance. In his turn, Ioan Petru Culianu considers[23] that one of the essential elements of the erotic rite is the occultation of love, seen, however, as the voluntary act of removing the object of love. In any case, what is evident is the fact that Renaissace Hermeticism made maximum use of magical eroticism in literature and of erotic magic in practice.

Since this study is focused on the influence of Jewish mysticism on Renaissance thinking, several key elements from this point of view must be mentioned in this context. As mentioned earlier here, the Hermetic tradition is based on the very interpretation of an act mentioned in the Jewish Holy Scriptures, which Silviu Lupaºcu plastically calls "erotic trade"[24]. Regarded from the erotic perspective, in Hermeticism the relation between the human and the divine plane gives knowledge and power (in symmetrical opposition with kabbalistic mysticism). In its turn, Jewish mysticism starts from a three-fold erotic act – Adam and Eve, Adam and Lilith/Snake, Lilith/Snake and Eve. At the core of its preoccupations there is always an erotic relation. Whether it deals with the interaction between Sefira Tiferet and Sefira Malkhut, as the male and respectively female aspects of the divine, or, by extrapolation, with the relation between the Tzaddik (righteous man = human plane) and the

[22] Michel de Certeau, *Fabula mistică, secolele 16 – 17*, Polirom, Iaşi 1996.
[23] Ioan Petru Culianu, *Eros şi Magie în Renaştere. 1484*, Nemira, Bucharest, 1994.
[24] Silviu Lupaşcu, *Sfinţi Ascunşi, Călăuzitori de Măgari*, idem.

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Shekhinah (God's presence in the world = divine plane), any mystical experience has in Judaism an erotic side. Among the kabbalistic rituals there is one of the wedding between God and the Community of Israel, seen as the King and His Matron, which is celebrated during Shavuot, the Festival of the Week, on the fiftieth day after the Pessach (Passover)[25]. The celebration of the Shabbat as a sacred wedding indicates the source of the Sabbatical ritual of magic, even though in the second case it deals with the demonic realm. Thus, for the adepts of Hermeticism the primordial force has a female nature (equivalent with the Tree), which reminds of the female aspect of the divine in Judaism. Moreover, the woman is seen as the wife of the God and implicitly as His power, just like the Shekhinah in Kabbalah. Both in Hermeticism and in Jewish esotericism the four primordial elements are Fire, Water, Air and Earth. In the Hermetic emanation process of these natural elements Water / female (Moon) principle is the passive manifestation of Fire / active male (Sun) principle, just like the passive female attribute (Hokhmah) emanates from the active male attribute of God (Keter).

But the influence of Jewish esotericism on Renaissance Hermeticism is perhaps best visible in the magic rituals themselves. Quoting from various sources, Culianu reminds that: "*in their magical practices, the theurgists often made use of a golden disc (strophalos) engraved with mystical signs and with a sapphire in its center. It could be spun with the help of a leather belt, while the theurgist would say magical formulas and, from time to time, utter inarticulated sounds imitating the voices of animals to scare away the evil spirits*"[26]. Among the magical symbols spread on these strophalos, the one made up of two semicircles and the Greek letter X reminded Christians (Justin the Martyr) of Moses' cross with a serpent of brass (Numbers 21:9).

Still, the most relevant aspect is related to what Culianu calls the "demonomagic". The structure of the demonic realm in Renaissance magic reveals a spectacular imagination (or better said series of imaginations). No doubt, this realm includes a mixture of the most varied notions, taken from the most diverse mythologies, amongst which the Judaic one is easily traceable. Starting from the works of Jamblichus[27],

[25] Great importance is granted to this festival within the kabbalistic tradition of the 50 gates of understanding.

[26] Ioan Petru Culianu, *Eros şi Magie în Renaştere. 1484*, idem, p. 204.

[27] Quoted by Ioan Petru Culianu, în *Eros şi Magie în Renaştere. 1484*, idem, p. 26.

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the supra-terrestrial beings of the Renaissance period were divided into several classes: the hyper-celestial gods and the stars' souls or the celestial gods, the archangels, the angels, the demons, the principalities, the heroes, the princes and the uprooted human souls. If the gods, the souls and the principalities come from other sources, it is obvious that the archangels, the angels, the demons, the heroes and the princes come from Judaism. We already know who the heroes are. In their turn, the archangels and the angels are loosely the same with those described in Jewish mythology. As for the princes, we must recall that Enoch / Metraton is also called *Sar ha-Panim*, Prince of the Divine Face. Even though their image was filtered, even the demons still show many of their Jewish traits, including the classification into good and evil.

Things become even more interesting when we read in the works of Byzantine author Mihail Psellos[28] that demons are capable to release seed and may be born in animal bodies, and moreover, they are all females. Opinions in this regard have varied along the time, oscillating between radical positions and positions that Culianu calls "moderate", which maintain that in reality demons are transsexual, so that they may equally act upon both sexes. Nevertheless, the attraction for female demons remains relevant here, for it reminds of the Jewish demonic line launched by Lilith, in her capacity of succubus. But, as we've seen in an earlier chapter, even Lilith is seen in Kabbalah as both female and male, being able to mate both with Adam and Eve[29]. In addition, as Gershom Scholem shows[30], in Judaism there had been exorcising rituals for both incubus and succubus since as early as the 6th century, which seems to indicate its precedence over the witchcraft practiced in Christianity.

According to the legend, Lilith found out and pronounced the Divine Name, and then retired in the caverns by the Red Sea. The more interesting becomes, under the circumstances, the Red Sea symbolism present in Hermetic alchemy: "*He who is curious to know what is this 'All-in-everyting' [indicated as purpose of the Art] should give the Earth large Wings, corner it so much that it would have to rise and fly higher than any*

[28] *On Demons*, II, quoted by Ioan Petru Culianu, in *Eros şi Magie în Renaştere. 1484*, idem, p. 208.

[29] The fact that in order to explain the manner in which this double capacity is possible Kabbalah proposes Lilith's association with Samael is less relevant for the point of view pursued here.

[30] Gershom Scholem, *Cabala şi Simbolistica ei*, Humanitas, Bucharest 1992.

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mountain, to the firmament, and then break its wings with the force of Fire, so as to fall in the Red Sea", explains Basile Valentin[31]. But, as Evola underlines, here the Red Sea is a symbol of the affirmative principle. On the other hand, however, we must remember that the Hermetic tradition has by definition a negative connotation, because it does not rely on the benevolent participation of the divine in the alchemic process, but on forcing the divine participation in the magic act, by conjuration.

Both in Kabbalah and in Renaissance Hermeticism we are dealing, in fact, with the same view of a negative eroticism, which distracts man from the righteous path. Even though the blame is thrown on demons, in reality this refers to an attraction towards the unknown divine powers, regarded from a sexual viewpoint. In both cases the aim of the theurgical exercise is to obtain knowledge of the demonic realm in order to be able to control it. Not by chance the Hermetic tradition counts among its sources the magic practices of King Solomon, of whose thousand wives Kabbalah says that they were as many demonic powers.

Between medieval Hermeticism and Kabbalah there is, however, a major difference. If, for the kabbalist the demonic realm is important precisely so that he could keep it away during the process of restoration of the original harmony and repair of the world (Tikkun Olam), for the Hermeticist this knowledge is necessary so that he could conjure the demons and force them to take part in the magic act, whose finality is not always positive.

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JEWISH MYSTICISM AND 20TH CENTURY SCIENCE

Felicia Waldman

In a collection of short SF stories published in the 1960's there was a sketch describing how a scholar created a self-generating computer program representing a virtual world in which virtual people lived virtual lives, with virtual joys and sorrows and virtual philosophical systems, who once in a number of virtual years would come to the revolutionary conclusion that there was no Creator.

* * *

Dissatisfied with what appearance had to offer but also with the intangibility of essence, all along history man has attempted to find (or, if necessary, to invent) the most unusual ways to exceed his natural limits. Generically translated into the development of science, this obsession for knowledge and understanding has lead, at the same time, to the preservation of the mystical tradition, which evolved in parallel with science, providing it with starting points and making up for its shortages. I am referring to the fact that many of the so-called scientific discoveries of our era have been proven to be nothing more than re-discoveries of knowledge that our forefathers had constantly and efficiently used at a time when preponderant was not science but religion (and implicitly mysticism). If, starting particularly from the 18th century, "science" gradually replaced the magical-mystical practices used so far, today we are witnessing a rebirth of these practices, accepted more and more as a "scientific" reality. Used by mystics in the past, alternative medicine is nowadays utilized worldwide. The uncovering of the human DNA only proved how accurate it had already been presented in the ancient Chinese treatise *I Ching*, whose divination structure was composed of 64

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hexagrams and 8 trigrams, which are in perfect correspondence with the DNA chain.

On the other hand, one must also remember the no less interesting fact that many of the scholars who took part in these scientific (re-)discoveries manifestly intended to prove, thereby, mystical theories/ points of view. An entire literature describing such cases has evolved, particularly during the recent years.

Placing himself in the tradition launched by Howard Hinton, Ioan Petru Culianu shows that what makes true understanding of the mystical phenomenon so difficult is the fact that all mystical manifestations take place in the mental universe, whose properties and infinite dimensions are probably the most challenging enigmas faced by mankind since its very beginnings. In fact, what are "the unconscious" and "the mind" else than the modern equivalent of the Shamanic rituals? Isn't the mystical quest an entry into what scientists conventionally call "the fourth dimension"? In the first chapter of his book *Out of this world*, entitled *The historian's kit for the fourth dimension*, Culianu provides a detailed analysis of the interaction between mysticism and science, quoting the case of Einstein[1]. But as famous from this point of view are also Giordano Bruno and Isaac Newton. Besides his particular interest in mathematics and astrology, Bruno shared the Renaissance passion for *ars combinatoria*. Of the Christian kabbalists he is, perhaps, the best-known, but paradoxically for precisely opposite merits. In a long demonstration Culianu[2] attempts to correct the classical image of Giordano Bruno seen as a "herald of the future, of a Freemason and liberal Europe", the scientist in the incipient state of the concept, proving that in fact Bruno was – and ultimately died for being – a defender of the past, of magic and *mnemotechnics*. In his turn, Isaac Newton constantly stated that his research was designed – and in his opinion it even succeeded – to prove the mystical reality of God's existence. Let us also not forget that when a team of American scholars attempted to build, based on the Biblical instructions, the Ark of the

[1] Ioan Petru Culianu, *Călătorii în lumea de dincolo* [Out of this world], Nemira, Bucharest 1994. Louis Pauwels and Jacques Bergier mention, in their turn, this connection in *Dimineaţa Magicienilor* [Le matin des magiciens], Nemira, Bucharest 1994

[2] Ioan Petru Culianu, *Eros şi Magie în Renaştere. 1484*, [Eros and Magic in the Renaissance. 1484] Nemira, Bucharest 1994

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Covenant, the result was an instrument of such powers that it had to be destroyed on the spot, being impossible to control. "Science" itself evolved, its theories being permanently modified. The theory of determinism has made way to the theory of "probability" and "uncertainty".

* * *

Under these circumstances it can't be surprising that a number of Jewish mystical notions and concepts find their match in modern science. Mysticism and science are ultimately two ways of seeking answers to the same questions and generally tumble over the same limitation: the understanding capacity and comprehensiveness of the human brain. That is why an essential focus of modern scientific inquiry is the intimate relationship between consciousness and the laws of physical reality. The uncertainty principle of quantum physics, which in essence establishes the impossibility of simultaneously determining certain pairs of subatomic phenomena (such as position and momentum), implies that the very act of human observation – or "consciousness" – irrevocably affects one of the properties which is being observed. Physicists disagree as to what degree of consciousness is necessary for the measurement of physical reality but are in consensus over the fact that consciousness can determine of its own the nature of the world we seek to know.

Jewish mysticism[3] gives particular warnings against the senses, which are misleading and must not be relied upon, as they are meant to perceive the effects but not the causes. In this regard, Jewish mysticism proposes the interconnection doctrine, rendered through a very interesting theory. The law of cause and effect is intrinsically related to the law of the concealed and the revealed. Any physical manifestation of a thing is the result of a cause that seems concealed due to the fragmented vision man has of reality, his full access being blocked by the five senses. From this point of view, time is seen as the illusion which creates the distance between cause and effect. This distance prevents us from perceiving the interconnection between the events in our lives, although it is always there. In other words, nothing is at random, everything happens for a reason. Regardless of how accidental an event may seem, it always has a cause hidden somewhere in the "past". Chaos is nothing but our

[3] Like all other types of mysticism, in fact

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incapacity to relate today's incidents to previous facts. At this point let us recall another generally accepted principle of modern physics, i.e. that time and space share a "common geography": just as all points in space co-exist along a single continuum, so too do all points in time – past, present and future – simultaneously distribute within the same network.

One of the most interesting correspondences between mysticism and science can be found in Lurianic Kabbalah and the modern scientific theories regarding the birth of the universe. During the 16th century, Isaac Luria, *Ari ha-Kadosh*[4] (the Holy Lion) of Safed, and his disciples, amongst whom the most important was Chaim Vital, were the first to propose a comprehensive kabbalistic mythology. Their kabbalistic myth included God's initial self-evolution, the creation of universe and mankind, the origins of evil as well as the methods for repairing it (*tikkun*) and restoring the original unity of God and creation. What is probably the most fascinating in the Lurianic outlook is the fact that God is not seen as a pre-existing static entity, but as an entity that undergoes itself a process of formation and evolution or, in other words, which gives birth to its own self. According to Luria, the coming into existence of the Universe was possible through a process of contraction (*tzimtzum*) of God. In order to allow the existence of the finite world, God had to withdraw from a portion of His inner self, mystical realm in which He returned through the act of creation and revelation. The first act of *Ein Sof* was therefore not outward but inward the Divine Being itself. Creative revelation began only with the second move of the divinity, the launching of the first ray of light, called *Adam Kadmon* (Primordial Man/Mankind)[5]. A rest of the divine light thus remained in the primordial realm. This outlook contains an internal contradiction: on the one hand, should the infinite not contract itself, everything would be overwhelmed by the divine totality, and on the other hand, God's Glory is said to be filling the world. This would explain why we can simultaneously perceive the world's imperfection and the divine omnipresence. Since man is a "small world" (*Olam Katan*), created in the likeness of God, the same applies to human nature. Reversely, just like in the case of the human body, the creation process is seen as a succession of divine inspiration and expiration.

[4] ARI, the acronym of Ashkenazi Rabbi Itzhak, means "lion" in Hebrew.

[5] This term doesn't refer to mankind in itself but to its implicit creation potential. Moreover, the same term designates the state in which the human soul becomes one with the divine.

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Further on, it may be noted that if God were abundance, His nature would contain the will to give. Consequently, there should also appear the possibility/will to receive, viewed by the kabbalist under the form of recipient vessels. According to Luria, the *Sefirot*[6], the ten attributes through which God manifests Himself, were originally of the same nature as the pure unmanifest Light. They acquired physical manifestation and became vessels in the lowest of the *Adam Kadmonic* worlds, the World of Speech or the Bound World, so called precisely because all its ten *Sefirot* resided in a single vessel. This was only a prelude to the World of Chaos (*Olam haTochu*) or the World of Points (*Olam Nekudot*), the first of the worlds to be emanated from *Adam Kadmon*, which became physically manifest. The two names come from the conception that in their initial state the *Sefirot* were unformed and unordered points[7]. Except for the first three of them, the rest were organized not in columns, but in a single row, making it impossible for them to interrelate. What determined the contraction (*tzimtzum*) was ultimately the excess of Severity, *Din*,[8] in a world dominated by *Nephesh* (the soul of desire or inferior passions).

If the recipient vessels of the first three *Sefirot* stood the divine Light, being closer to the source, the other six cracked and broke in a process called *Shevirat ha-Kelim* (breaking of the vessels). Moses Luzzato, 18th century kabbalist, explains: "*The effect on the first three Sefirot was only that of annulment only, rather than debasement. Only the rear portion of the first three Sefirot "fell"; and even this rear portion did not descend any lower than the world of Emanation (Atzilut)*". Through this supernal Crisis then, the lower worlds came into being: "[...] *In this fashion, the innermost part of each vessel descended into Creation (Beriah); the interior part descended into Formation (Yetzirah); and the exterior part descended into Action (Asiyah)...*"[9] Thus, the lower worlds are described as coming into being through the fall

[6] Keter (crown), Hokhmah (wisdom), Binah (intelligence), Gedullah (greatness) or Hesed (lovingkindness/mercy), Gevurah (might/rigor), Tiferet (beauty), Netzach (victory), Hod (glory), Yesod (foundation) and Malkhut (kingdom).

[7] The grounds of this outlook may be found in Genesis 1:2: "*And the Earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep*".

[8] By extension it is considered that *Din* was responsible for the Fall.

[9] Moses Luzzato, *General Principles of the Kabbalah,* Research Center of Kabbalah, Jerusalem New York.

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of the seven lower *Sefirot* of the World of Points, while the fragmented parts of the first three *Sefirot*, i.e. the rear portions of *Netzach*, *Hod* and *Yesod* of *Keter* (each *Sefira* including in it the full set of ten *Sefirot*) and the complete *Netzach*, *Hod* and *Yesod* of *Hokhmah* and *Binah*, became the rest of the World of Emanation (*Atzilut*). In this kabbalistic doctrine of "descending worlds" one may easily recognize another foundation of modern physics: all physical structures tend toward their lowest possible energy level. According to most physicists, the universe has already achieved its lowest level of energy distribution, thus being close to entering a new state of equilibrium. This was already predicted, long ago, by the kabbalists, who estimated that in its evolution the world would pass through 7 eons, *shemitot*[10], corresponding to the 7 inferior *Sefirot*, ending in a state of symmetry and equilibrium, summed up in the Great Jubilee Year of the worlds.

Following the shattering of the Universe (the Divine Unity) at that point in the creation process, some of the light that had been in the vessels found its way back to *Atzilut* but the rest fell down with the vessels themselves. "Holy Sparks" thus spread in all directions, some returning to the Source and others falling in the world under the form of things and beings, which are thus filled with such "sparks", regardless of how pointless they may seem at first sight. This led to the apparition of the *klippot*, husks that represent the evil for they keep enclosed the sparks of the *Sefirotic* light. The new recipient vessels can receive and give at the same time, which explains why the current universe contains both abundance and poverty. This is the reason why in Judaism the acts of charity and lovingkindness are so important. Starting from this cosmogonic outlook, Jewish mysticism proposes a process of Repair / Correction of the World (*Tikkun Olam*), or restoration of the primordial Unity, by bringing together all these scattered sparks. In this context, the mystical enterprise is aimed at influencing the worlds (both the spiritual and the physical one) through direct participation in the "reparation". As

[10] This forecast is not characteristic to Jewish mysticism only. Suffice it to recall the Christian belief regarding the new era that would come with the return of Jesus or the Hindu conviction concerning the new period in which the world is going to enter after Kali Yuga.

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Gershom Scholem[11] shows, through prayer and meditation the kabbalist contributes to the raising of the sparks and thereby to the restoration of the original state of perfection, before the creation of cosmos. This idea corresponds to the Chaos Theory of modern physics – all disturbed systems have the tendency to return to their pre-existent state of "quasi-stationary equilibrium". At the same time one may also recognize here the physical theory of the symmetry that must have characterized the incipient universe. It is known that the mathematics of modern physics utilizes symmetry-groups when it wants to cancel out "undesirable" conceptual phenomena such as infinities. Thus, any return to the primordial unity of creation would correspond to the return to maximal symmetry.

Following the breaking of the vessels, for the creation to be able to proceed, the universe was restored in five aspects (or faces) called *partzufim*, more capable of channeling the divine energy. The first is included in *Keter* and is known under the name of **Arikh Anpin** (Long Face or Long-Suffering). It represents the divine will and the union of all beings in absolute love and mercy. The second is included in *Hokhmah* and is called **Abba** (Father). It represents the divine intuitive wisdom. The third is derived from *Binah* and is called **Imma** (Mother). It stands for rational understanding. The next is called **Ze'ir Anpin** (Little Face or Impatient) and it is a mixture of the following six *Sefirot*. It represents the divine aspect of judgment and limitation. Standing for God's immanence within the world, *Malkhut* forms the last *partzuf* under the name of **Nukva**[12]. It is the partner of **Ze'ir Anpin**; their union brings together the feminine and masculine, immanent and transcendent aspects of God. The universe thus restored is at the same time dynamic and holographic, being characterized by the interconnection of its composing elements, which allows the evolvement of communication and the flow of energy. The *Sefirotic* Tree itself is a holographic image, with each *Sefira* containing all the others. One may easily recognize here the modern theory of the fractals, proposed by Benoit Mandelbrot[13]. First in isolated papers and lectures, then in two editions of his seminal book – The Fractal Geometry of Nature – Mandelbrot argued that many of science's traditional

[11] Gerschom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism,* Schoken Books, New York, 1961.

[12] From the Hebrew word "nekeva" = feminine

[13] Who, incidentally, was of Jewish origin

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mathematical models are ill-suited to natural forms and processes and that in fact many of the shapes mathematicians had discovered generations before are useful approximations of natural phenomena as diverse as tree bark, lung tissue, clouds and galaxies. The theory of fractals starts from the idea that the universe around us is not linear but fractal in nature – we see the same pattern appearing time and again, no matter what scale it is examined on. For instance, each tributary is itself a river with smaller tributaries. Each coastline contains bays and peninsulas containing bays and peninsulas, right down to grains of sand. From this perspective, the entire universe is contained in itself to an ever smaller scale.

To briefly recap the kabbalistic outlook on creation it is enough to refer to the Ineffable Name YHVH. The first letter, the scintilla-like *Yud*, represents the initial "contraction" (*tzimtzum*) of Divine light from which was produced the initial vacuum of space and time. On the other hand, it also stands for Fire, the primordial element corresponding to the male principle of God. The second letter, the spatially-expanded *Hey*, represents the initial emergence of created being. It also stands for Water, corresponding to the female principle of God. The third letter, the linear *Vav*, symbolizes the sudden extension of that being into all directions of space. Furthermore, it conceals the hint that there exist some additional dimensions which are actually "enfolded" within those that we commonly identify. Not by chance, *Vav* also stands for Air. Finally, the repetition of the letter Hey at the end of God's Name hints once again at the idea of expansion – this time the final expansion of the universe whereby it settled into its Divinely-intended form, corresponding to the Earth.

Let us now return to the scientific theories regarding the apparition of the universe. According to these theories, the cosmological process that produced the space-time continuum is presently considered to have taken place in four stages, the first three of which are derived from the "string" theory while the last is popularly known as the "big bang" theory. Just like Kabbalah, the string theory (which in theory is able to unify the four known forces of nature and thereby achieve a "unified field theory" but as of yet it is unable to be validated by experiment) states that all of reality exists in (exactly) ten dimensions: four revealed (the three spatial dimensions plus time) and an additional six concealed within the first four. Not by chance the kabbalists consider that the "perfect" numeral system is the decimal one. Just like Kabbalah, physics teach us, then, that at first the mathematical properties and relations governing

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space-time had to be defined or "created". Next, in a single quantum leap, "something-ness" emerged spontaneously out of that "abstraction". At that point, a great "inflation" of the universe occurred wherein it expanded, instantaneously, to the order of 10 to the 50^{th} power. Finally, the "big bang" unleashed the full thrust of its force from within a single point inside that inflated universe. From then on, the universe as we know it began expanding – albeit infinitely slower than it had up till then – congealing into its present state as its structural elements proceeded to cool down. (If we put the two explanations side by side we shall soon realize that from the point of view of the human capacity of understanding and comprehensiveness the "scientific theory" sounds at least as metaphysical as the mystical one!).

* * *

Often labelled as a pseudo-science, astrology has in fact provided the basis for many of the modern sciences. From an astrological perspective, the ancient civilizations are known to have had knowledge of astronomy that in certain aspects outruns even the information we have today. As new data are discovered, it becomes more and more obvious that they were already known to our ancestors, whose life depended to a large extent on the observation of the sky and on its influence over everyday life.

Like all esoteric sciences, astrology starts from the conviction that man is a microcosm whose life is influenced by the macrocosm and it is only natural for everything that occurs above, in the Celestial World, to be reflected directly into what happens below, in the material world. If in most ancient civilizations the planets were seen as representations of the Gods, in monotheistic Judaism they were regarded as symbolic representations of the Divine Attributes of the One Supreme Creator, and each of them was related to one of His Ineffable Names. Their "powers" were modified in their influence by their placement in the various Zodiacal Signs and Houses of Astrology. Thus, there were Zodiacal Signs of Rulership where a divine aspect could manifest itself plenary, Signs of Exaltation, where an aspect had even greater means of expression, Signs of Fall, where a Power had difficulty expressing its nature and Signs of Detriment, where it was most difficult for a Power to manifestation itself. The task of the true astrologer was not just to understand the zodiacal chart and read man's fate correctly but also to restore the soul's

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equilibrium and bring it back to the primordial state. First one had to treat the "envelope", or the body, then, in successive stages, the other "envelopes" of the soul that are made of more rarified matter. To be able to do this one needed profound knowledge of Theosophy and Theurgy.

According to the esoteric writings, God created the universe by the equilibration of two opposing forces, which may be found in most traditions under the form of the Twin Pillars, attributed to Seth by the Egyptians, to Hermes by the Greeks, to Solomon by the Jews. The two Pillars were, in fact, archetypes of the Primordial Male and Female emanations of the Divinity under the form of Fire and Water, Sun and Moon, Yin and Yang, etc., depending on the tradition. As each element had three modes of operating – cardinal (representing the beginning of manifestation of an "element" of the Divine Name), fixed (representing the concentration and consolidation of an element) and mutable (representing the end of manifestation of an element and its preparation for transmutation or change) – there result twelve permutations of the Divine Name, corresponding to the twelve signs of the Zodiacal Light. In *Derech haShem* (The way of the name) Moses Luzzato shows that the Zodiacal Light is produced by the to and fro movement in time and space of the Ineffable Name, which alternates the male and female principle as it proceeds in whirling motion. The Zodiac is thus not static but in a circular movement that follows the immutable Divine Law and reflects the *Sefira Hokhmah* or the Archetypal Wisdom of the Divinity on the Tree of Life. Not by chance there are twelve tribes of Israel, twelve "heavenly gates" to the New Jerusalem, and twelve labors of Hercules. Furthermore, the Tree of Life and the 32 concealed paths of Wisdom which form the "ladder" to the upper world represent in order: 10 divine aspects, 12 aspects of the Zodiacal Light, 7 "old" Planets and 2 primordial elements – fire and water – plus the principle that balances them.

Even though the astrological predictions may be arguable, today no one questions the fact that beside their influence on the physical manifestations of nature on Earth, the Sun and the Moon also bear a direct influence on the manifestations of the human psyche. Without taking into account various legends such as those related to werewolves and other similar creatures, experts agree on the fact that, for instance, the full moon period does have implications upon the balance of human and animal behavior. Similarly, recent events have proven what astrologers

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predicted long time ago: that the planets' alignment has a direct influence on people's physical reactions and implicitly on their lives.

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Attributed to the ancestral Egypt[14], which fascinated the Europeans with its mysteries, alchemy returned into the preoccupation of Western Europe through the Arab writings – translations or even original works – that reached particularly Moorish Spain. If the first translations into Latin appeared in Spain around 1150, a century later alchemy was already included in *Speculum Maius*, Vincent de Beauvais' encyclopedia.

It is said that the very name of this science comes from Arabic, from the word *el-kymia*, which refers to the Egyptian town of Khem, where it is supposed to have been practiced in long forgotten times. History mentions Gabir Ibn Hayyan, whom the Romans called Geber, as one of the greatest alchemists of the first millennium, with his *Science of the Equilibrium*, which points out the relation between the manifest and the occult in each body[15]. Still, as Mircea Eliade shows[16], the primary source of medieval alchemy was the alchemy of the Hellenistic period, described by such books as *Tabula Smaragdina* (Emerald Table) of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, *Turba Philosophorum*, etc., rediscovered by means of translations. *Tabula Smaragdina* must have been accessible to European philosophers even before the *Corpus Hermeticum,* since in 1357 Hortulanus was already publishing his commentary of it, while the *Corpus Hermeticum* was only translated into Latin in 1463, by Pico della Mirandola. Moreover, it is obvious that there has also always been a Jewish alchemy *per se*, practiced during the Middle Ages by various kabbalists, which influenced, in its turn, Western European alchemy.

In its philosophical sense, alchemy is ultimately a fundamental form of esotericism, because it starts from the equivalence between the

[14] Quoting Stapleton, who stated that the alchemy of Alexandrian Egypt must have first developed at Harran, in Mesopotamia, Eliade shows that this thesis is actually contested, since there is also a Hindu alchemy, a Chinese alchemy, and so on. (Mircea Eliade, *Istoria Ideilor şi Credinţelor Religioase*, [History of Religious Ideas and Beliefs] Editura Ştiinţifică, Bucharest 1991.

[15] In reality, there are over 3.000 volumes attributed to him, which has led scholars to believe that there were actually several writers who wrote under this name during a period of time ranging from the 8th to the 10th century AD.

[16] Mircea Eliade, *Istoria Ideilor şi Credinţelor Religioase*, idem.

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One and the Multiple and it pursues the ascent on a transcendental and metaphysical plane, through an anagogical interpretation. The Unity is seen as a suspension of the duality between the Self and the non-Self, which dominates the ordinary perception of reality, just as in classical mysticism, when one aims to attain the unitive mystical consciousness. In its medieval definition, in which the Jewish influence is the most visible, the Sacred Science of the transmutation of "basic" metals into "gold" (by projecting a "red dust" upon them) is the Hermetic application of the knowledge about the Upper and the Lower World, both crossed by the same universal FIRE, of the Ineffable Name, which either destroys the profane, or raises those who possess the Virtue. The basic metals are equivalent to the planetary archetypes of astrology, and their transmutation is achieved by redirecting the "fire", represented by the "dragon". They are balanced by the Sun's Light (Aurum = Gold), which illuminates them by means of the Philosopher's Stone (divine knowledge). It is evident that under the cover of the physical experiments the secret tradition referred to the purification of the soul, to the mystical transmutation of the mind in view of obtaining direct divine knowledge. From this perspective, particularly in its Jewish form, alchemy was a mystical technique.

Nevertheless, there were, of course, countless attempts to give the experience a practical meaning. From these experiments emerged specific knowledge of chemistry whose validity was demonstrated by the ulterior evolution of natural sciences. Many of the forerunners of modern chemistry were renowned alchemists of their time. It is sufficient to recall Paracelsus (Phillipus Aureolus Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim) (1493-1541), whose passion for medicine, astronomy and natural philosophy is well-known. He practiced a medical alchemy in which the body was seen as a collection of balancing principles, and illness represented the loss of this balance. If, however, we put aside the spiritual assumptions behind the alchemical forces, we shall discover something very close to Newtonian physics, which in its turn starts from Jewish-based mystical hypotheses. Thus, the circle closes proving that Jewish mysticism provided an important source of inspiration for modern scientific discoveries, which only validated its views of this world.

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CHAPTER TWELVE

THE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN MUSLIMS AND JEWS IN THE FIELD OF SCIENCE IN THE MIDDLE AGES

Mariano Gómez-Aranda

The cultural interchange among Christians, Muslims and Jews that took place in the Middle Ages in the field of science is one of the best topics to appreciate the positive aspects of intercultural relations among followers of the three Abrahamic religions. Medieval science is one of the fields in which relations between Muslims and Jews were most fruitful. In this paper I will analyze how the Greek and Arabic cultures were accepted and integrated in the Jewish culture through the action of some Jewish scientists. Special attention will be given to Abraham ibn Ezra's appropriation of the theories of Muslim astronomers and astrologers. I will also study how Abraham bar Hiyya used the theories of Muslim scientists in their works, and analyze the influence of Muslim philosophers on Maimonides.

The Valuation of Muslim Astronomers and Mathematicians in Abraham ibn Ezra's Works

Ibn al-Muthanna's *Commentary on the Astronomical Tables of al-Khwarizmi* is an important work in the history of medieval science, because it represents the influence of Hindu astronomy on the procedures and methods to elaborate astronomical tables, which, until the time of al-Khwarizmi (d. ca. 850), followed the rules of Greek-Ptolemaic astronomy. This work is also an attempt to harmonize the two major sources of Arabic astronomy: the Hindu and Ptolemaic sources. Abraham ibn Ezra's translation of *Ibn al-Muthanna's Commentary* into Hebrew is of a great importance, because the Arabic original text is lost, and it survives only in two translations into Hebrew and one translation into Latin. One of the Hebrew translations—the so-called "Parma version"—was carried out by Abraham ibn Ezra.

Abraham ibn Ezra's own introduction to his translation contains his own interpretation on the transmission of Hindu and Greek astronomy

to the Muslim culture. It also includes a valuation of the contribution of the most important Greek and Arabic astronomers known at his time. Ibn Ezra's account may be summarized as follows:

> The first Abbasid caliph (ca. 750) had heard of the sciences of the Indians and wished to have some of their books translated into Arabic, for profane sciences were unknown to the Arabs at that time. He was not sure that this was religiously permissible until the angel of dreams assured him of it. He sent for a Jew and told him to go to Ujjain (in West Central India) to bring back an Indian scholar, which by some subterfuge the emissary managed to do. The Jew served as an interpreter between the Indian, Kanka, and the Arab who translated the book of Indian astronomy, containing the tables of the seven planets, the rising times of the zodiacal signs, the arrangements of the astrological houses, and some other data relevant for the practice of astronomy.[1]

This account emphasizes the role of the Jews in the process of transmitting science in the Middle Ages. The Jew in the story acted as an intermediary between two cultures—the Indian culture and the Arabic culture—and participates in one of the most important activities for scientific transmission: translations. There are many examples of outstanding scientists of Jewish origin who worked for Muslim caliphs as astronomers, astrologers, physicians and translators. One of the most relevant Jewish scientists was Hashday ibn Shaprut, who worked for the Umayyad caliph Abd al Rahman III in al-Andalus and was responsible for the translation of the *Materia Medica* by Dioscorides into Arabic in the tenth century. Ibn Ezra himself was also a translator of grammatical works—such as Judah Hayyuj's *Sefer otiyyot ha-noah* (Book of Week Letters), *Sefer pe'alei ha-kefel* (Book of Verbs with Double Letters) and *Sefer ha-niqqud* (Treatise on Punctuation)—and scientific works—such as *Ibn al-Muthanna's Commentary*. In his account, Ibn Ezra is portraying the situation of Jewish translators in his own time, not at the time of the first Abbasid caliph, and is probably presenting himself to his audience as a mediator in the process of transmission of science from India to the Western world.

Ibn Ezra continues his account by affirming, that in the book of Indian astronomy, there was no mention of the reasoning in all the astronomical matters, and that "only facts are given as matters of tradition." According to Bernard Goldstein, this proves that "only the

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[1] B.R. Goldstein (ed.), *Ibn al-Muthanna's Commentary on the Astronomical Tables of al-Khwarizmi* (New Haven-London: Yale University Press 1967) 4, 147–8.

rather complicated procedures were transmitted to the Arabs, and that the explanation and the meaning of these procedures remained unknown to them."[2] Ibn Ezra's remark also proves his sensitivity to the need to provide reasons and arguments to scientific matters, which was precisely the main purpose of his own scientific writings.

Abraham ibn Ezra continues his account by affirming that

> There arose a great scholar among the Arabs, who knew the secret of the sciences of reckoning and chronology. [...] This scholar was Muhammad b. Musa al-Khwarizmi, and all later Arabic scholars multiply, divide and extract square roots as is written in his book on Hindu reckoning. Al-Khwarizmi prepared the entire set of tables in a different manner, which is easier for students and which is equal to the work of Kanka, the Hindu scholar, but he also did not give proofs for his statements.[3]

In this paragraph, Ibn Ezra recognizes the great contribution of al-Khwarizmi to the history of mathematics and astronomy. Abu Jafar Muhammad b. Musa al-Khwarizmi played an important role in the field of mathematics. He introduced the Indian numerals and the decimal positional system into the Arabic mathematics. In his work, preserved only in Latin manuscripts, one of which is entitled *Algoritmi de numero indorum*—from which the word *algorithm* comes from—al-Khwarizmi explains the decimal place-value system of numeration, using a small circle for zero. In his *Kitab al-Mukhtasar fi hisab al-jabr wa-'l-muqabalah* ("Abridged Book on the Calculation of Integration and Equation"), al-Khwarizmi explains the basic concepts of algebra in Arabic.[4]

Al-Khwarizmi's works influenced Abraham ibn Ezra's *Sefer ha-Mispar* ("The Book of the Number"). In this mathematical treatise, Abraham ibn Ezra claims that the decimal positional system was invented by the Indian sages. *Sefer ha-Mispar* is a textbook dealing with the basic arithmetic operations, such as multiplication, division, addition, subtraction, fractions, proportions and square roots. In his introduction, Ibn Ezra explains the decimal positional system, which implies the symbols for 1 to 9 and an additional "void" symbol for 0 as a placeholder. Ibn Ezra says that this symbol is "like a wheel" and later he

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[2] B.R. Goldstein, *Ibn al-Muthanna's Commentary*, 4.

[3] B.R. Goldstein, *Ibn al-Muthanna's Commentary*, 148.

[4] M.J.L. Young et al. (eds.), *Religion, Learning and Science in the Abbasid Period.* The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature, vol. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1990), vol. 3, 255.

refers to it as a "wheel, like straw before the wind, designed to keep the values in their degrees, and which in a foreign language (namely, Arabic) is called sifrah."[5] According to etymologists, the Arabic word *sifrah* passed to the Latin as *zephirum*, and then to *cero* (Spanish) and *zero* (French, English).[6]

The importance of Abraham ibn Ezra's *Sefer ha-Mispar* is that it was one of the first works to introduce the arithmetic of al-Khwarizmi into Europe, as well as the decimal positional system, in parallel with a Latin contemporary version entitled *Liber ysagogarum Alchorismi*. One of the 8 extant manuscripts of this Latin version attributes the translation to *Magister A*. Who was *Magister A*? Names such as Adelard of Bath, Abraham bar Hiyya and Petrus Alphonsi were presented as plausible candidates, but it is not impossible that *Magister A* was Abraham ibn Ezra himself.[7]

In the introduction to his translation of Ibn al-Muthanna's commentary, Ibn Ezra also appreciates the importance of Al-Khwarizmi's astronomical tables. These tables, known in Arabic with the name of *zij*, are based primarily upon Indian rather than Ptolemaic astronomical principles. A *zij* is a set of tables for calculating solar, lunar, and planetary positions, eclipses, etc. The astronomical tables of al-Khwarizmi is now extant in the version of Maslama al-Majriti translated into Latin by Adelard of Bath. According to E.S. Kennedy and Van der Waerden, al-Khwarizmi's *zij* is sometimes classified as a Persian *zij*, sometimes as an Indian *zij*. The central part of al-Khwarizmi's *zij* is a table of mean motions in years, months, days, and hours. In India no such tables are known, but they are known in Persian and Greek astronomical works. These authors conclude that the Muslims got the idea of such a table set starting with mean motions not from the Greeks, but from the Persians. This is confirmed by the fact that the most usual word for such a table, the word *zij*, is derived from Pahlavi *zik*.[8]

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[5] M. Silberberg (ed.), *Sefer Ha-Mispar. Das Buch der Zahl. Ein hebräisch-arithmetisches Werk des R. Abraham ibn Esra* (Frankfurt a. M. 1895) 4a.

[6] J. Vernet, *Lo que Europa debe al Islam de España* (Barcelona: El Acantilado 1999) 96. One of the earliest testimonies of the origin of the word *zero* is found in Ibn Ezra's *Sefer ha-Mispar*.

[7] S. Sela, "Abraham Ibn Ezra's Scientific Corpus: Basic Constituents and General Characterization," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 11 (2001) 91–149: 97. For a discussion on this Latin arithmetic, see A. Allard, "The Arabic Origins and Development of Latin Algorisms in the Twelfth Century," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 1 (1991) 233–83.

[8] Kennedy, E. – Van der Waerden, "The World-Year of the Persians," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 83 (1963) 315–27: 326–7.

Abraham ibn Ezra specifically values al-Khwarizmi's didactic approach in the presentation of his tables, and affirms that "al-Khwarizmi prepared the entire set of tables in a different manner, which is easier for students." In this statement, Abraham ibn Ezra shows that the appreciation of Al-Khwarizmi's didactical approach is intimately connected with one of his own interests in writing scientific works. Almost all of Ibn Ezra's scientific writings were designed as "textbooks" to provide his students with easy access and understanding of terms, concepts and general principles of astronomy, astrology, and mathematics.[9] However, he seems concerned about al-Khwarizmi's lack of rational basis for his tables, which as I said before, it was also one of Ibn Ezra's aims. Providing rational explanations to the Biblical text was the main purpose of Ibn Ezra's exegesis. In this sense, Ibn Ezra recognizes the merit of al-Farghani's approach, because, he "gave reasons for all the statements of al-Khwarizmi."

After referring to Ptolemy's *Almagest* as the most perfect book in the science of astronomy, Ibn Ezra adds the following statement,

> All the proofs which Ptolemy—who is also called Talmi—brought forth in his great book called the *Almagest* are complete. No scholar can contradict his proofs, for they are taken from the science of measurement called *geometria* in Greek, and *gematria* by the sages of Israel.[10]

Ibn Ezra then refers to Muhammad ibn-Muthanna, the commentator of al-Khwarizmi, as "a scholar more eminent than the others in the science of geometry and astronomy." What Ibn Ezra values the most of Ibn al-Muthanna's works is that "he included short proofs and diagrams whose principles are taken from the *Almagest*," and adds "in some places he elaborated on the explanation of Ptolemy the king, and in other places he even adds geometrical proofs of his own." That is, Ibn al-Muthanna expanded the rational arguments given by Ptolemy

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[9] S. Sela, *Abraham ibn Ezra and the Rise of Medieval Hebrew Science* (Leiden-Boston: Brill 2003, henceforth, *The Rise*) 85.

[10] B.R. Goldstein, *Ibn al-Muthanna's Commentary*, 149. The Hebrew word *gematria* was originally used to refer to one of the hermeneutical rules for interpreting the Bible. It consists of explaining a word or group of words according to the numerical value of the letters, or of substituting other letters of the alphabet for them in accordance with a set system. But this word is an example of the influence of the Greek scientific language into the Hebrew language: although the word is normally employed in the sense of interpreting the Bible according to the numerical value, it is also found with the meaning of "calculations" in texts of the Talmud and in medieval scientific texts; see J. Levy, *Neuhebräisches und chaldäisches Wörterbuch* (Leipzig, 1876), vol. 1, 324.

and in some cases, he added rational proofs to Ptolemy's theories, and this is highly appreciated by Ibn Ezra.

We observe than in the appraisal of the Arabic scientists, Ibn Ezra stresses their capability to provide rational explanations on scientific theories. This is typical of Ibn Ezra's style: he values the rational capabilites of some scientists, and criticizes the absence of them. For example, in his *Sefer ha-Moladot*, he quotes Ptolemy's theory of the division of the seven ages of human beings, each of them alloted to a specific planet, and he adds "so wrote Ptolemy, but he did not provide any reason for this division," and then Ibn Ezra adds his own reason.

Ibn Ezra also appreciates al-Muthanna's didactic approach when affirming that "he arranged his book in the form of questions and answers for greater clarity." As is well known, his question-answer method was used in philosophical and scientific writings in order to expose the rational arguments in a didactical manner.

Abraham ibn Ezra then makes the following statement, "there is no difference between Ptolemy's rules for planetary motion and those of the Hindu scholar, except in a few places." In fact, there are important differences between these two astronomical models. As Bernard Goldstein remarks "the most essential differences are that the Hindu theory makes no mention of the equant, and that the methods of interpolation are entirely different." Why does Ibn Ezra say that there are no such differences or that there are only a few? According to Goldstein, it is obviously a personal and particular appreciation, which was only in his mind, and which is related to his desire to harmonize the two major sources of Arabic astronomy, which was also Ibn al-Muthanna intention.[11]

However, Ibn Ezra finds some points of disagreement between Ptolemy and the Arab astronomers. The most important difference is that, according to Ptolemy, the apogees of the planets are fixed with respect to the fixed stars, and according to the Arab astronomers, they move. He then says that

> [Ptolemy] concluded that the solar apogee does not move as do the apogees of the remaining six planets. But many scholars have observed that the sun's apogee moves just as the apogees of the five planets do, and its position today, in the year 1160 of the Christian era, is Gemini 27°.

[11] B.R. Goldstein, *Ibn al-Muthanna's Commentary*, 244.

> These are the Arab scholars who observed the apogee of the sun, and all of them did not live at one time. The first was Habash the Arab, and Yahya b. Abi Mansur, al-Marwadhi, Ibn al-Muqaffa, al-Sufi, Yaqub al-Kindi, Thabit b. Qurra, the Hindu sage, Theon the Alexandrian, Ibrahim al-Zarqal the Spaniard, al-Battani, Ibn al-Isti, and Ibn al-Alam.[12]

As Goldstein points out, this lists of Arab astronomers seems to be "a catalogue of the works from which Ibn Ezra drew his knowledge of astronomy,"[13] and Sela adds that it is "an excellent means of learning about the scientific data and sources available in Al-Andalus in the 12th century or earlier, and especially of identifying the most prominent astronomers and astrologers."[14]

In these remarks, we observe that Ibn Ezra emphasizes the importance of Arab scientists in the evolution of astronomical data from the time of Ptolemy. He recognizes that the contribution of the Arab astronomers is that they provided more precise data on the movement of stars, which is a rather modern appreciation of the evolution of science in the Middle Ages. As is stated in our current histories of science, Arab astronomers expressed originality and innovation in the correction, extension, articulation, and application of the existing theories, rather than in the creation of new models or new principles.[15]

Ibn al-Muthanna's treatise exerted an important influence on one of Ibn Ezra's scientific works written in Latin. His book *De rationibus tabularum* ("The Book of the Reasons of the Astronomical Tables") provides astronomical and astrological theoretical knowledge for whoever may be interested in using the astronomical tables, and to expound and explain the main traits and uses of these astronomical tables. This work includes many paraphrases drawn from Ibn Ezra's translation of Ibn al-Muthanna's treatise. For example, the treatment of trigonometry in *De rationibus tabularum* is explicitly based on an Indian tradition reported in Ibn al-Muthanna's treatise.[16] A formula for computing the solar altitude at a given time if the noon solar altitude

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[12] B.R. Goldstein, *Ibn al-Muthanna's Commentary*, 150.

[13] B.R. Goldstein, *Ibn al-Muthanna's Commentary*, 246.

[14] S. Sela, *The Rise*, 87.

[15] D.C. Lindberg, *The Beginnings of Western Science* (Chicago – London: The University of Chicago Press 1992) 176.

[16] J.M. Millás Vallicrosa, ed., *El libro de los fundamentos de las tablas astronómicas de R. Abraham ibn Ezra*. Edición crítica, con introducción y notas (Madrid-Barcelona: CSIC 1947) 130. See also B.R. Goldstein, *Ibn al-Muthanna's Commentary*, 176.

on that day is known is the base of a table attributed to al-Khwarizmi. This formula is preserved both in Ibn Ezra's *De rationibus tabularum* and in Ibn al-Muthanna's Commentary.[17]

The Jewish Calendar

The second chapter of Abraham ibn Ezra's *Sefer ha-Ibbur* ("The Book of Intercalation") discusses the theoretical fundamentals of the Jewish calendar. Abraham ibn Ezra deals with the controversial question of the length of the solar year, and presents the opinions of several astronomical schools in the matter.[18] According to Ibn Ezra, there are three schools of astronomers separated by the question whether the exact length of the solar year is more or less than 365 days plus a quarter of a day.

The first school is represented by those who add a small amount of time to the quarter of a day. This is the theory of the scholars of India and Persia, and some Arabic astronomers, such as al-Khwarizmi, Maslama, Masha'allah, and Abu Mashar. According to them, the length of a solar year is 365 days plus a quarter of a day (6 hours) and the part they proposed to add is approximately 12 minutes or 12 and a half minutes. According to this reckoning, the exact duration of the year is 365 days, 6 hours and 12 minutes or 12 and a half minutes.

The second school is represented by Ptolemy. According to him, the length of a solar year is 365 days plus a quarter of a day (6 hours) minus the 300th part of a day, that is, around 5 minutes. According to this reckoning, the exact duration of the year is 365 days, 5 hours and 55 minutes.

The third school is represented by some Arabic astronomers, such as Al-Battani, Ibn Sina and Azarchiel, who followed Ptolemy's principle of deducting a certain amount of time from the additional part of the day. According to them, the length of a solar year is 365 days plus a quarter of a day (6 hours) minus the 106th part of a day, that is, 13

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[17] J.M. Millás Vallicrosa, ed., *El libro*, 157ff. and B.R. Goldstein, *Ibn al-Muthanna's Commentary*, 82 and 207.

[18] This question is also treated in his *Liber de rationibus tabularum*, *Epistle on the Sabbath*, the *Responsa* to Joseph Narboni, *Book of Nativities*, *Book of the World*, and in both versions of his *Book of Reasons*. See S. Sela, *The Rise*, 40, 280ff.

and a half minutes. According to this reckoning, the exact duration of the year is 365 days, 5 hours and 46 and half minutes.[19]

In the exposition of these theories, we observe one of Ibn Ezra's most typical stylistic features. Ibn Ezra is very much concerned in offering the different opinions of his predecessors on certain scientific ideas in order to show the contradictions among them, and also in order to offer his own ideas. In consequence, he presents his own scientific ideas after the analysis of contradictions among the theories of his predecessors. As Sela remarks "Ibn Ezra tends to transforms the presentation of some specific subjects into an arena where scientists and scientific schools belonging to different times, nations and religions meet together and clash on some scientific issue."[20] Sometimes Ibn Ezra expresses his own inclination to one of the presented opinions, but in other cases, he disagrees with all the precedent opinions, and offers his own independent one.

How does Ibn Ezra proceeds in this particular case? In the exposition of the reckoning of the second school in his *Book of Intercalation*, and more clearly in his *Liber de rationibus tabularum*, Ibn Ezra remarks that the reckoning of the Jews is closer to that of Ptolemy's. In his *Liber de rationibus tabularum*, he affirms, "according to the calculation of the Jews and to their way of computing the holidays, the fraction which is less than a quarter of a day in the framework of a year is equivalent to the 320th part," which is very close to the 300th part of Ptolemy's proposal.

But in order to evaluate Ibn Ezra's appraisal of this controversial issue, we must focus our attention in the context in which this disquisition on the length of the solar year is introduced. In the *Book of Intercalation*, Ibn Ezra is dealing with the question of the difficulties for the Jewish people to conjugate the difference between a solar year and a lunar month.[21]

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[19] For our current era, the exact length of the year was determined by an atomic clock in 1956, and the value is 365 days, 5 hours, 48 minutes and 46 seconds; see D.E. Duncan, *The Calendar* (London: Fourth State 1998) 277.

[20] S. Sela, *The Rise*, 88.

[21] The Jewish calendar is a mixed system, the months being reckoned according to the moon (29 days) and the years according to the sun (365 days and a quarter of a day). In order to adjust the difference between a solar year and the 12 lunar months (which is 11 days), one extra month is added in the years 3, 6, 8, 11, 14, 17 and 19, which is the last of the cycle; see Abraham ibn Ezra's long commentary on Exod 12:2.

Regarding the question of the Jewish calendar, Ibn Ezra affirms that "we [the Jews] ought to rely, without any doubt, on what our sages have transmitted to us, their words are correct, and if we act according to them, we fulfill our religious obligations." He then introduces the different theories of the length of the solar year, and concludes that "we are unable to know the length of a solar year in the Torah and the Prophets."[22] In his commentaries on Exod 12:2 and Lev 25:9, Ibn Ezra insists that the questions of fixing the Jewish calendar, and the celebration of the Jewish festivals are not explained in the Torah, but they depend on the authority of the sages, as established in the Jewish tradition.

The conclusion is that, in the case of the Jewish calendar, Ibn Ezra presents different scientific opinions in order to prove that scientists were unable to determine universally accepted values, such as the determination of the length of a year. Therefore, the multiple solutions proposed by scientific research in this matter are of little avail for the worshipper who needs clear-cut calendric instructions to perform his ritual obligations.[23] In such cases, Ibn Ezra considers that the Jews should trust in the opinion of the sages, because it is based on tradition, which is one of the pillars of Judaism.

Did Ibn Ezra think that the Jewish calendar does not follow any scientific rule? All of the contrary. As he indicates in the passage of his *Book of Intercalation*, the reckoning of the Jews is close to Ptolemy's reckoning. As S. Sela remarks, this observation implies first, that the decisions of Talmudic tradition regarding the Jewish regular calendar were based on astronomical considerations, and secondly, that the astronomical computations and values obtained by the ancient Jewish science were related to the scientific contribution of Claudius Ptolemy.

Although Ibn Ezra was totally in favour of sciences, and he even encouraged his readers to go deeply into the scientific knowledge, he was also conscious of the limitation of science, and in the cases in which science is unable to provide a clear response to the ritual practices, he proposed to rely on the knowledge transmitted by the Jewish tradition.

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[22] L. Silbermann, *Abraham ibn Ezra. Sefer ha-Ibbur* (Lyck 1874) 8a.
[23] S. Sela, *The Rise*, 89.

Historical Astrology and the Influence of Abu Mashar on Ibn Ezra

Abu Mashar Gafar ibn Muhammad ibn Umar al-Balhi (known as Albumasar in the West) is probably one of the best-known astrologers in the Middle Ages. He was born in Persia in 787 C.E. and died in Iraq in C.E. 886. He is best known for the works he wrote on historical astrology. This branch of astrology consists in the predictions of various conditions or changes concerning caliphs, dynasties and religions, wars, and conquests, by means of eclipses, conjunctions, periods, revolutions of the years, and other astronomical factors.

In his *Book of Religions and Dynasties (On the Great Conjunctions)*, Abu Mashar analyses, among other things, the influence of the planets on the origin and development of the different religions of human beings. Abu Mashar affirms that differences of religions may be ascertained by looking at the mixtures of Jupiter—which according to Abu Mashar is "by nature an indicator of faith"—with another planet positioned in the ninth horoscopic house. He says:

> If Jupiter is mixed with Saturn, it indicates that the faith of the people of that religion is Judaism, which is similar to the essence of Saturn. [...] If the mixer with it is Mars, it indicates the worship of fire and the faith of Mazdaism. If the mixer with it is the Sun, it indicates the worship of the planets, idols and the marvellous. If the mixer with it is Venus, it indicates revealed religion, and monotheism, like Islam and the like. If the mixer with it is Mercury, it indicates Christianity, and every faith containing antipathy, doubt, and trouble.[24]

In this paragraph, we observe the identification of the most important religions with a planet: Judaism is associated with Saturn, Islam is associated with Venus, and Christianity is associated with Mercury. Abraham ibn Ezra's concepts of historical astrology are influenced by Abu Mashar's ideas. In the fourth chapter of his *Sefer ha-Teamim* ("Book of Reasons"), Ibn Ezra explains that Saturn is the planet of the Jews, Venus is the planet of the muslims, and the Sun (not Mercury, as in Abu Mashar's text) is the planet of the Christians.

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[24] K. Yamamoto and C. Burnett (eds.), *Abū Maʿšar on Historical Astrology: The Book of Religions and Dynasties (On the Great Conjunctions)* (Leiden – Boston – Köln: Brill 2000) 45.

Particularly significant is the case of the identification of Saturn with the Jews.[25] According to Abu Mashar, Judaism "is similar to the essence of Saturn." What does this similarity consists of? What is the essence of Saturn? In Greek and Arabic astrology, Saturn is considered the most malignant of the seven planets; it is the cause of destruction, long illnesses, consumptions, witherings, exile, poverty, imprisonment, mourning, fears, deaths, and some other terrible things. Abraham ibn Ezra himself, when describing this planet in his *Beginning of Wisdom*, says:

> Its nature is very pernicious; it denotes destruction, ruin, death, affliction, weeping, grief, complaint, and ancient things... It denotes separation, wandering, poverty, indigence, humiliation, distant and bad roads in which lurks danger, and it does not meet with success in any undertaking.[26]

How was explained in the Middle Ages that the Jews are connected and governed by such a malignant and wicked planet? In a negative way, this idea contributed to expand anti-Jewish sentiments in the Middle Ages and the beginning of the Modern era. For example, the king of Granada in the 11th century, Abd-Allah, affirmed that the charateristics of the Jews are "avarice, meanness, stinginess, deception, and treachery" because they are governed by the planet Saturn.

How did Ibn Ezra face such an embarrasing question? Ibn Ezra deals with the connections between Saturn and the Jews in several passages of his scientific works and his biblical commentaries. In his *Book of Nativities*, Ibn Ezra deals with genethialogical astrology, whose fundamental principle is that the destiny of the new-born is determined by the configuration of the celestial sphere at the instant of birth. In this book, we find the following paragraph:

> If in the natal horoscope of an Israelite we find that the planet Saturn is in the ninth horoscopic house, that circumstance will not signify that his religious belief will be wrong, but if the same natal horoscope applies to the births of the Ishmaelites, that will be the case.[27]

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[25] On an analysis of Ibn Ezra's ideas of the influences of planet Saturn on the Jews, see S. Sela, "Abraham ibn Ezra's Appropriation of Saturn," *Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts* 10 (2004) 21–53; see also *The Rise*, 151–8.

[26] R. Levy and F. Cantera (eds.), *The Beginning of Wisdom. An Astrological Treatise by Abraham Ibn Ezra* (Baltimore – London – Oxford – Paris: The Johns Hopkins Press, Humphrey Milford, Société d'édition "Les belles letters," 1939) 193–94.

[27] S. Sela, *The Rise*, 347–8.

In the second version of this book, we find a similar paragraph:

> If Saturn is in the ninth horoscopic house of a Jew, his religious faith will be strengthened, but if Saturn is in the ninth horoscopic house of a Christian or of a Muslim, their religious faith will be weakened.[28]

In these two paragraphs, Ibn Ezra concentrates on the influence that the planet Saturn exerts on the religious belief of a Jew, a Muslim or a Christian, when the planet is positioned in the ninth horoscopic house. In medieval astrology, the ninth house of the horoscope is considered to play a crucial role in shaping religious faith. It is called "the house of faith," "the house of God" or "the house of prophecy." Ibn Ezra affirms that the ninth horoscopic house is the place which indicates "the religious belief and the way to worship God."

But the central idea of these two paragraphs is to emphasize that Saturn performs a double function as regards the religious faith of human beings. On the one hand, Saturn plays its regular, unfavorable role in the private horoscope of a Muslim and of a Christian and behaves as the most malignant planet. But, on the other hand, Saturn is a star which exerts a special collective influence over nations and religions, and it is regarding this special quality that Saturn is considered as the planet of the Jews. That is to say, while Saturn damages the Muslim and the Christian as mere individuals, Saturn favors the Jew as a member of a nation or religion. In consequence, as Saturn is not the planet of the Muslims nor of the Christians, the malefic planet behaves towards them in a regularly damaging way, and causes harm to their religious belief. But since Saturn is the planet of the Jews, the malefic planet does not exert on the Jews its typical, adverse influence, and does not molest them in the observance of their religious belief.

We find another remarkable example of how Ibn Ezra justifies the malefic influences of Saturn in his explanations of the Ten Commandments.

In medieval astrology there existed the idea that there are connections between the planets and the days of the week. These connections are the origin of the names of the days of the week. For example, in English, Monday is the day of the moon (as in Spanish *lunes* comes from Luna), Saturday is the day of Saturn, etc. In his commentary on Exod 20:13, Ibn Ezra explains the reasons for the ten

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[28] S. Sela, *The Rise*, 156.

commandments. The fourth commandment says "Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy." According to the Jewish tradition, this means that you should not do any kind of work whatsoever. How does Ibn Ezra relates the idea of Saturn as a wicked planet and also as the planet influencing the Jewish people and governing the Sabbath? This is Ibn Ezra's explanation:

> The fourth statement (commandment), the statement about the Sabbath, corresponds to the sphere of Saturn. The astrologers tell us that each one of the planets has a certain day in the week in which its power is manifest... They say that Saturn and Mars are harmful stars. Therefore harm befalls anyone who begins any work or sets out on a journey when one or the other dominates... It is therefore unfit for one to occupy himself on Saturday with everyday matters. On the contrary, one should devote himself on this day to the fear of God.[29]

Ibn Ezra tries to give a "rational" explanation of the prohibition to work on Saturdays by connecting this religious commandment with the medieval idea of the astrological influence of the planets: it is unappropriate to do any work on Saturdays, because Saturn's power on this day will lead to terrible consequences.

What is behind Ibn Ezra's explanations concerning the influences of the planet Saturn is an attempt to justify that such a terrible planet can be seen in a positive way on the part of the Jewish people. After accepting the general idea of medieval astrology that Saturn is a malignant planet and that is the planet of the Jews, Ibn Ezra tranforms it into a positive concept which may serve for a double purpose: on the one hand, it serves to explain the biblical text according to the rules of astrology, on the other hand, it is an effective way to assimilate astrological issues by Ibn Ezra's Jewish audience.

The Influence of Masha'allah on Ibn Ezra's Astrology

Masha'allah was a Jewish convert to Islam who was born in Basra in 762 C.E. and died in 815. He is known for having introduced Sassanian astrology to the Arabs and to the Abbasid court. His works

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[29] Abraham ibn Ezra, *Commentary on the Pentateuch: Exodus (Shemot)*. Translated and Annotated by H.N. Strickman and A.M. Silver (New York: Menorah Publishing Company 1996) 433–4.

on astrology are some of the most important sources of Ibn Ezra's astrological ideas.[30]

Abraham ibn Ezra cites Masha'allah in several of his astrological works. Although he criticizes Masha'allah's opinions on certain specific ideas, Ibn Ezra generally accepts Masha'allah's interpretations in the field of astrology. In a fragment from his *Sefer ha-Teamim* ("Book of Reasons") Ibn Ezra says the following:

> Everything you may find of Ptolemy that deals with the spheres is correct and nothing is available that surpasses it, but his assertions related to the judgments of astrology do not benefit his wisdom, therefore you should only rely in this area on what has been said by Doronius the king and Masha'allah.[31]

In consequence, for Ibn Ezra, Claudius Ptolemy was an authority in the field of astronomy, as well as Masha'allah in the field of astrology.

Abraham ibn Ezra's *Sefer ha-Mibharim* ("Book of Elections") is an astrological treatise dealing with the system designed for choosing the most auspicious moment for accomplishing a specific act, by casting the horoscope and observing the place of the moon in the astrological houses. Abraham ibn Ezra cites Masha'allah's considerations on certain influences of the stars in some specific moments.

For example, according to Masha'allah, one should avoid to enter a city in an hour of Saturn or Mars, because it will lead to terrible consequences. On the contrary, one must enter a city in an hour of the Sun, the Moon, Jupiter or Venus. Then, Ibn Ezra adds:

> I am surprised at Masha'allah for he said that from the rising sign at the time of entering a city it is posible to deduce for how long a person will stay there, and he gave many examples of this idea. But this is a terrible mistake, because many people enter a city at the same time, either in groups or in a line, and some stay, some go through, some spend the night, some die, and some are delayed. But this depends on their own horoscope, and not on the power of the star in which he enters.[32]

Therefore, according to Ibn Ezra the future of a person who enters a city does not depend on the sign ruling the time when he or she enters, but it depends on the horoscope at the time of his or her birth.

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[30] E.S. Kennedy and D. Pingree, *The Astrological History of Masha'allah* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1971).

[31] S. Sela, *The Rise*, 370.

[32] J.L. Fleischer (ed.), *Sefer ha-Mibharim le-Rabbenu Abraham ibn Ezra* (Jerusalem 1939, henceforth, *Mibharim*) 12.

Regarding the power of the planets depending on the house they are located; Ibn Ezra says the following:

> Masha'allah said that Mars in the third house or in the ninth house causes more damage than Saturn, but Saturn causes more damage [than Mars] at the sea in the places mentioned above. You must take into account that the tenth house decides on the mast, and if Mars is there, it decides that the mast be broken; but if Saturn is there, it decides that the mast be destroyed.[33]

Ibn Ezra opposes to this opinion, because he considers that the power of stars and planets is stronger than that of the houses. He gives more importance to the nature of the sign than to the house in which it is located.

But Ibn Ezra agreed with Masha'allah's opinions in several cases. In the question of the influence of the constellations on conceiving children, Ibn Ezra affirms:

> Masha'allah said that conceiving children in the sign of Scorpio is difficult, because it does not predict a good future. In his *Book of Interrogations*, he said that this sign is totally false. If someone ask you a question and the rising sign is Scorpio, do not give a judgment, because the judgment will be false. For conceiving you have to take into account the ruler of the hour, because it has a strong power. If the ruler of the hour is Saturn or the Moon, they are better than the good stars, and the hour of the Sun is in the middle, but the hour of Mars and Mercury are the worst.[34]

Ibn Ezra also quotes Masha'allah's opinions regarding the qualities of a servant depending on the stars at the moment of his purchase:

> Masha'allah said that if the Moon is in the sign of Pisces it means that the servant will not have a good heart with his master, because he suspects that he is going to cause any harm to him. But if the Moon is in the sign of Taurus, then it is good, because his master will love him with all his heart; if it is in the sign of Sagittarius, then the servant will be stronger than his master and he will escape... Masha'allah said that Venus is better than Jupiter in this matter, and he is right, because it is a lower star.[35]

Ibn Ezra follows Masha'allah in the question of the election of the best moment for war. According to Masha'allah

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[33] *Mibharim*, 12.
[34] *Mibharim*, 13.
[35] *Mibharim*, 14.

> one has to take into account whether the Moon is separated from a good star or from a strong star [...] the reason is that the star from which the Moon is separated decides on the person who goes to war.[36]

Abraham bar Hiyya's Use of Arabic Sources

Abraham bar Hiyya (ca. 1065–ca. 1140) was a pioneer in the rise of medieval Hebrew science. He was the first medieval Jewish intellectual to write in Hebrew for a Jewish audience about astronomy and astrology in the framework of the reception of Graeco-Arabic science.[37] His astrological work, *Megillat ha-Megalleh* ("Scroll of the Revealer") was designed to foretell the exact date of the coming of the Messiah by means of Scriptural data; it also includes a Jewish and universal astrological history up to the coming of the Messiah. Abu Mashar's *Book of Religions and Dynasties* was a major source in Bar Hiyya's *Megillat ha-Megalleh*.

His astronomical work *Surat ha-Ares* ("The Shape of the Earth") is a geography in which he explained the theory of the seven climates, a traditional division of the terrestrial globe into climatic zones, invented by the Greeks and transmitted in Hebrew, Arabic and Latin treatises in the Middle Ages. This work long remained the chief source of geographical knowledge among Jews. Al-Farghanni's *Liber de aggregationibus scientiae stellarum et de principiis coelestium motuun* is the major source used by Bar Hiyya in his *Surat ha-Ares*.[38] Bar Hiyya follows al-Farghanni in the description of the seven climates, and in the names of the countries and cities included in each climate. Chapters II, III and IV of Bar Hiyya's work correspond to chapters XII–XVIII and XXVIII–XXX of al-Farghanni's work, and deal with the disposition of the planetary orbits, the movements of the Sun and the Moon, and the eclipses of the Sun and the Moon. On the calculations of the movements of the planets, Bar Hiyya follows al-Farghanni, although he includes references to Ptolemy's *Almagest*.

Chapter IX of *Surat ha-Ares*, in which Bar Hiyya expounds the measurements of the Earth and its proportions with respect to the planets

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[36] *Mibharim*, 15.

[37] S. Sela, "Abraham Bar Hiyya's Astrological Works and Thought," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 12 (2005) 128–58.

[38] J.M. Millás Vallicrosa (ed.), *La obra Forma de la Tierra de R. Abraham bar Hiyya ha-bargeloní* (Madrid-Barcelona: CSIC 1956) 12–16.

and the stars of the eighth sphere, follows chapters VIII, XXI and XXII of al-Farghanni's work.

In his work *Heshbon Mahlakhot ha-Kokhavim* (*The Computation of the Motions of Stars*), Bar Hiyya exposed the Ptolemaic astronomical system in Hebrew. He followed al-Battani's *Zij al-Sabi* very closely, and some chapters of his *Heshbon* constitute a word-for-word or paraphrastic translation into Hebrew of some chapters of al-Battani's *Zij al-Sabi*.[39] Chapter I of Bar Hiyya's work deals with mathematical operations with degrees and fractions, and follows chapter II of al-Battani's work, although Bar Hiyya uses a different terminology and arranges the tables differently. In the explanation of the calculation of arcs, sines and cosines, Bar Hiyya coincides with al-Battani even in the order of explanations. Bar Hiyya uses al-Battani's formulas to calculate the ascent of the zodiacal signs, their diurnal and nocturnal arcs, and the value of their hours.

Chapter XI of Bar Hiyya's work follows chapter XLVII of al-Battani's work, and explains how to calculate the latitude of the planets with respect to the ecliptic. He also follows al-Battani in the explanations to calculate the conjunctions and oppositions of the Sun and the Moon, and the eclipses of the Moon and the Sun. Bar Hiyya coincides with al-Battani in the calculations to determine the visibility and invisibility of the planets; however, some of the quantities in Bar Hiyya's text are different from al-Battani's Arabic text, but they coincide with the Latin translation of al-Battani's work made by Plato of Tivoli in cooperation with Bar Hiyya.

Chapter XVIII of Bar Hiyya's *Heshbon* explains how to calculate the ascendant and the mid-heaven, and expounds the standard method for calculating the twelve horoscopic houses; it coincides with chapter XIX of al-Battani's *Zij*. Bar Hiyya also follows al-Battani in the methods to calculate the timing and the ascending degree of the anniversary nativity, a special type of horoscope.[40] In the calculations of the motions of stars in the houses, Bar Hiyya's text seems a word-for-word translation of al-Battani's Arabic text.[41]

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[39] J.M. Millás Vallicrosa (ed.), *La obra' Séfer Hešbón mahlekot ha-kokabim de R. Abraham bar Hiyya ha-bargeloní* (Barcelona: CSIC 1959) 14–18. See also S. Sela, "Abraham Bar Hiyya," 137–8. On al-Battani's astronomical works, see Al-Battani sive Albatenni, *Opus Astronomicum, latine versum a Carolo Alphonso Nallino* (Mediolani 1903).

[40] S. Sela, "Abraham Bar Hiyya," 137.

[41] J.M. Millás Vallicrosa, *Séfer Hešbón*, 17.

The Influence of Muslim Philosophers on Maimonides' Guide of the Perplexed

As is well known, Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* has many points in common with the works of Hellenistic and Muslim philosophers. Apart from Aristotle, other Greek intellectuals such as Plato, Epicurus, and Galen are mentioned several times in the *Guide*. Among the Muslim philosophers, al-Farabi is the one whom Maimonides held in the highest esteem. The philosophic position with respect to the problem of the eternity of the world and the theory of prophecy as part of a political philosophy were described by Maimonides in a style and a mode of exposition similar to those of al-Farabi. The philosophic thought of Maimonides was to a considerable extent determined by the necessity to face the challenge offered by the Muslim and Jewish theologians known as the Mutakallimum. In this necessity, al-Farabi was a great service, because some of his works exposed definitions and descriptions of the purpose, attitude, and methods of the Mutakallimum.[42]

Maimonides also adopted several philosophical ideas of Avicenna. The cardinal point of Maimonides' negative theology, that is, that God should not be regarded as having any positive attributes pertaining to His essence, and that He should only be described by using negative attributes, was taken from Avicenna's philosophic system. Avicenna's influence can also be recognized in Maimonides' statement that the prophets can reach knowledge of reality without having previously grasped the apparently necessary theoretical premises to this knowledge. Parallels to this view can be found in Avicenna's *Book of the Healing of the Soul.*

Maimonides follows the Aristotelian Muslim philosopher Ibn Bajja regarding the idea that the intellect being is the only portion of human beings that survives bodily death, and that nothing individual remains after death. In contrast to al-Farabi, who considered that political activity was a most essential duty of the philosopher, Ibn Bajja defended the idea that the philosopher should choose solitude and loneliness in his own country in order to achive human being's supreme goal: the

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[42] Moses ben Maimon, Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed.* Translated and with an Introduction and Notes by Shlomo Pines (Chicago–London: The University of Chicago Press 1963). On the influence of Muslim philosophers on Maimonides, see Pines' analysis in pages LXXVIII–CXXXII.

union with the Active Intellect. Maimonides echoed Ibn Bajja's views when describing the prophet, the highest degree of human beings, as a perfect solitary who regards the rest of the people "as either domestic animals or beasts of prey."

Although Maimonides refutes certain extremes teachings of the Mutakallimun, he follows them on one of the most important points, namely, the temporal creation of the world. Among the Mutakallimun, Maimonides follows al-Ghazali in the idea that the God of religion who possesses free will and is not bound to act in accordance with the rules of nature is the antithesis of the God of the Aristotelian philosophers, who is restricted by the immutability of these rules.

Conclusions

Abraham ibn Ezra recognizes the important contribution of the Arab astronomers in the development of medieval science, and he specially stresses the merits of those who provide arguments and rational explanations on scientific theories and of those who express these theories in a didactical manner. His appraisal of the changes and corrections introduced by Arab astronomers in the measurements of the motions of the celestial bodies signifies the recognition of the evolution of astronomy in the Middle Ages.

In the case of the Jewish calendar, Ibn Ezra shows the different opinions concerning the length of the solar year in order to prove that science is unable to offer clear-cut calendric instructions to perform the Jewish ritual practices. In such cases, he proposes to follow the opinions of the ancient sages, which are based on tradition, one of the pillars of the Jewish religion. Ibn Ezra accepts the general idea that Saturn is a malignant planet and that it is the planet of the Jews, but transforms it into a positive concept in order to stress the advantages that the planet Saturn has for the Jewish people. The great Muslim astrologer Masha'allah is considered by Abraham ibn Ezra as an authority in the specific field of astrology, in the same way that Ptolemy is considered an authority in the field of astronomy.

In his *Surat ha-Ares*, Abraham bar Hiyya used al-Farghanni's theories to describe the seven climates, and to explain the movements of the planets, the eclipses of the Sun and the Moon, and the measuremenst of the Earth with respect to the planets and the rest of stars. In his *Heshbon Mahlakhot ha-Kokhavim*, Bar Hiyya follows al-Battani's

Zij al-Sabi so closely that some chapters of his *Heshbon* constitute a word-for-word or paraphrastic translation into Hebrew of some chapters of al-Battani's work.

Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* has many points in common with the works of Muslim philosophers. Maimonides' concept of the eternity of the world and the theory of prophecy as part of a political philosophy were inspired by al-Farabi. The cardinal point of Maimonides' negative theology was taken from Avicenna's philosophical system. He follows Ibn Bajja regarding the idea that the intellect being is the only portion of human beings that survives bodily death. He also follows the Mutakallimun in the idea of the temporal creation of the world.

These Jewish intellectuals are examples of how intercultural dialogue among different religions can be achieved in the fields of astronomy, astrology, and philosophy; however, when dealing with religious beliefs and the practice of religion, the Jewish intellectuals marked a distance with respect to Islamic religion and became apologetic. Interreligious dialogue, in the sense as we understand it today, did not take place in the Middle Ages.